



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 19 MAY 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	05/18 US Embassy in Kyiv reopens
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/05/18/ukraine-Kyiv-US-embassy-reopens-Antony-Blinken/5021652910023/
GIST	<p>May 18 (UPI) -- Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Wednesday that the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, has reopened for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine three months ago.</p> <p>Blinken tweeted photos of the embassy and the U.S. flag flying in front of it.</p>

Return to Top	<p>"The Stars and Stripes fly again over Embassy Kyiv. I can announce that we have officially resumed Embassy operations in Ukraine's capital. We stand proudly with the government and people of Ukraine as they bravely defend their country from Putin's brutal invasion. Slava Ukraine!" Blinken tweeted.</p> <p>Operations at the embassy were suspended in February to protect U.S. personnel after the invasion.</p> <p>In a statement Wednesday, Blinken promised added security.</p> <p>"As we take this momentous step, we have put forward additional measures to increase the safety of our colleagues who are returning to Kyiv and have enhanced our security measures and protocols," he said.</p> <p>While celebrating the embassy's reopening, Blinken warned of "challenges ahead" as Russia's war in Ukraine "rages on."</p> <p>"Russia's forces inflict death and destruction on Ukrainian soil every day," he said. "With strength of purpose, we reaffirm our commitment to the people and government of Ukraine, and we look forward to carrying out our mission from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Russians fear Mariupol abuse backfire?
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-war-abuse/2022/05/18/id/1070460/
GIST	<p>The U.S. has gathered intelligence that shows some Russian officials have become concerned that Russian forces in the ravaged port city of Mariupol are carrying out grievous abuses, a U.S official familiar with the findings said Wednesday.</p> <p>The Russian officials are concerned that the abuses will backfire and further inspire Mariupol residents to resist the Russian occupation. The U.S. official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that the Russians, who were not identified, also feared that the abuses will undercut Russia's claim that they've liberated the Russian-speaking city.</p> <p>The abuses include beating and electrocuting city officials and robbing homes, according to the intelligence finding.</p> <p>The new intelligence has been declassified and was shared by a U.S. official as some of the last Ukrainian fighters in the devastated city emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks. The fighters were ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city and face an uncertain fate.</p> <p>Hundreds of the fighters had held out for months under relentless bombardment in the last bastion of resistance in the devastated city.</p> <p>The city has been reduced to rubble and has seen some of the most intense fighting of the war.</p> <p>The seaside city captured worldwide attention after a March 9 Russian airstrike on a maternity hospital, and then after another airstrike a week later on a theater that was serving as the city's largest bomb shelter. At the theater, the word "CHILDREN" was written in Russian on the pavement outside to deter an attack. Nearly 600 people were killed, inside and outside the theater, by some estimates.</p> <p>It was unclear the extent of the suspected abuse gleaned in the U.S. intelligence finding, but it comes on the heels of widespread human rights abuses in and around Bucha and the suburbs of Kyiv.</p> <p>Evidence of the massacre in Bucha emerged early last month after Russian forces withdrew from the city.(Photographs and video from Bucha showed body bags piled in trenches, lifeless limbs protruding from hastily dug graves, and corpses scattered in streets where they fell.</p>

	<p>Meanwhile, the first captured Russian soldier to be put on trial by Ukraine on war-crimes charges pleaded guilty on Wednesday to killing a civilian and could face life in prison.</p> <p>Russian Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a tank unit, pleaded guilty to shooting an unarmed 62-year-old Ukrainian man in the head through a car window in the opening days of the war. Ukraine's top prosecutor has said some 40 more war-crimes cases are being readied.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Recall: Ford SUVs
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/ford-expedition-navigator-recall-engine-fire/2022/05/19/id/1070501/
GIST	<p>Ford Motor Company said Thursday it was recalling 39,000 SUVs after reports of 16 fires, and has advised owners to park their vehicles outdoors and away from structures until a fix is completed.</p> <p>The recall, which covers some 2021 model year Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator vehicles, was prompted as an engine compartment fire could occur while the car is parked or being driven, even with the ignition off, the No. 2 U.S. automaker said.</p> <p>There was one injury but no accidents related to the fires, it said, and 14 of the 16 affected vehicles were owned by rental car companies.</p> <p>A remedy was still under development and Ford was working to establish the cause.</p> <p>This year, Ford has issued 30 recalls in the United States covering 3.5 million vehicles, the most of any automaker.</p> <p>Ford this week issued two other recalls, including 2016 Super Duty F-250, F-350, F-450, and F-550 trucks because dust may accumulate in the steering wheel clock spring, causing an electrical disconnection, resulting in driver air bags not deploying as intended. Owners will have their vehicles' steering wheel clock springs replaced. Ford has no reports of injuries.</p> <p>Ford is also updating the software in 464 2021 Mustang Mach-E vehicles with all-wheel drive because a powertrain control module may fail to detect a software error, resulting in unintended acceleration.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Russia spends \$15.5M/per hour Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-money-generals/2022/05/18/id/1070431/
GIST	<p>Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which dates back to Feb. 24, has apparently come with an exorbitant price tag.</p> <p>According to Russian Ministry of Finance data released Tuesday, Russia has spent nearly 1 billion rubles — or a burn rate of approximately \$15.5 million per hour — on the Ukraine war.</p> <p>The data also reveals Russia invested 628 billion rubles into the war effort during April, which breaks down to 21 billion rubles per day, citing a report from The Moscow Times.</p> <p>That daily amount alone might be comparable to the annual budget of some entire regions in Russia, according to the Times.</p> <p>As such, Russia's defense budget has more than doubled since the war began nearly three full months ago.</p> <p>In January, the Russian government reportedly spent 233.7 billion rubles on the military, and that figure increased to 369 billion in February when Russia began moving troops and equipment to the Ukraine borders, in anticipation of a strategic attack.</p>

In April, Russia's national defense budget mushroomed to approximately 628 billion rubles — a 43.7% increase from the previous April (275 billion rubles).

All told, from January through April, the Times reports Russia spent a grand total of [1.681 trillion rubles](#) on military expenses.

That amounts to more than three times the monies earmarked for education (517 billion rubles) and healthcare (615 billion rubles) in Russia, according to the Times.

In late April, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said Russia's budget had gone from a surplus to a projected deficit of 1.6 trillion rubles.

Siluanov also said the country's National Wealth Fund (NWF) would be used as the main source for [financing the budget deficit](#).

"If revenues will be higher than planned, we will spend less from the NWF," Siluanov said about accessing Russia's rainy day funds, which apparently contain oil revenues. "In the opposite case, then we will spend more from it."

Russia's war with Ukraine has become an exercise in attrition for the Russian forces, who've had to deal with apparent dissension among the ranks, the deaths of battlefield generals, [and a reported shortage](#) of sophisticated guidance missiles.

Also on Sunday, the British Ministry of Defense released a report, estimating Russia has already lost one-third [of its ground forces](#).

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HEADLINE	05/18 Vast swath at risk of summer blackouts
SOURCE	https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/vast-swath-of-us-is-at-risk-of-summer-blackouts-regulator-warns-1.1767730
GIST	<p>A vast swath of North America from the Great Lakes to the West Coast is at risk of blackouts this summer as heat, drought, shuttered power plants and supply-chain woes strain the electric grid.</p> <p>Power supplies in much of the US and part of Canada will be stretched, with demand growing again after two years of pandemic disruptions, according to an annual report. It's among the most dire assessments yet from the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, a regulatory body that oversees grid stability.</p> <p>"It's a pretty sobering report, and it's clear the risks are spreading," John Moura, director of reliability assessment and performance analysis, said in a press briefing. "I certainly do think it's our most cautionary tale here."</p> <p>Climate change is partly to blame. A historic drought is covering the western US, limiting supplies of hydroelectric power, and forecasts call for a hotter-than-average summer. But the fight against global warming poses its own risks as older coal-fired plants close faster than wind farms, solar facilities and batteries can replace them.</p> <p>"The pace of our grid transformation is out of sync" with the physical realities of the existing power network, Moura said.</p> <p>Supply-chain snags, meanwhile, are delaying Southwest solar projects and Texas transmission lines, while coal plants are having trouble obtaining fuel amid increased exports. And power grids face a growing threat of cyberattacks because of US support for Ukraine following the Russian invasion, according to NERC.</p>

Electricity supplies will be particularly tight in the Midwest. Across the region, enough older plants have shut down to cut generation capacity 2.3 per cent since last summer. Demand, however, is expected to grow. Even when temperatures are normal, grid managers may need power from neighboring regions to keep air conditioners humming, and a heat wave or low wind speeds could trigger blackouts, according to the report. NERC had previously warned the Midwest could face power shortfalls as plants close, but not until 2024. The region also is missing a key transmission line damaged by a December tornado, with repairs expected to wrap up in June.

Early retirement of fossil fuel plants is an issue in other parts of the US as well. The coal and natural gas plants that continue to operate are running harder, and NERC expects them to break down more often, Moura said. The gas-fired plants in Texas that shut unexpectedly late last week during a spring heat wave underscore that risk, he said.

Throughout the West, drought will limit the output from hydroelectric dams. It even threatens power plants that draw their cooling water from the Missouri River, which is running low, according to the report. Wildfires amplified by the drought could darken skies with smoke, cutting the output from solar plants while simultaneously forcing homes with rooftop solar panels to rely more on the grid.

Last year, NERC issued a warning that was nearly as grim, saying electric grids that serve more than 40 per cent of the U.S. population were at risk of outages. In the end, most systems held up during the heat. One notable exception was in the Pacific Northwest, where Avista Corp. resorted to rolling blackouts during a unrelenting June heat wave, leaving more than 9,000 homes and businesses without power.

Some of the states cited in the report have already issued their own summer forecasts, some more upbeat than others. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas said in a Monday report that the state — which endured a deadly, days-long blackout last year during a winter storm — has enough power to meet expected record demand from June through September, although some analysts called the report too optimistic.

“We feel very confident about summer; our reserves have gone up,” said Brad Jones, Ercot’s interim chief executive officer, during a press briefing Tuesday. Still, when supplies are strained, Texans will be asked to conserve earlier than they were in the past, Jones said. “I hope that each of you will turn to conservation as a way to both lower your bill as well as to help all of us in the market.”

California’s grid operators, in contrast, have warned that the state faces a risk of blackouts during the next three summers as the state shifts to cleaner energy. Hydropower generation has shrunk with the drought, older gas-burning plants have closed, and electricity supplies grow strained on hot summer evenings when the sun sets on the state’s many solar plants.

“We know that reliability is going to be difficult in this time of transition,” said Alice Reynolds, president of the California Public Utilities Commission, during a May 6 press conference.

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HEADLINE	05/18 China warns US over Taiwan support
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/china-warns-us-a-dangerous-situation-forming-over-taiwan/ar-AAAXrE1A
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- China’s top diplomat again warned the US over its increased support for Taiwan, showing the island democracy remains a major sticking point between the world’s biggest economies as Beijing sent more military aircraft toward the island.</p> <p>“If the US side insists on playing the Taiwan card and goes further and further down the wrong road, it will certainly lead to a dangerous situation,” Yang Jiechi, Beijing’s top diplomat, said in a phone call with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.</p>

Yang said Washington should “have a clear understanding of the situation,” according to a statement posted online by his nation’s Foreign Ministry. “China will certainly take firm action to safeguard its sovereignty and security interests,” he added.

The White House issued a short statement on the Wednesday call, saying the pair “focused on regional security issues and nonproliferation.” They also discussed Russia’s war against Ukraine and specific issues in U.S.-China relations, it added.

The Yang-Sullivan call was the most high-level contact between the US and China since Joe Biden and Xi Jinping spoke in March, their first conversation following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Ties have remained frosty since then, with the nations sparring over Vladimir Putin, democracy in Hong Kong, forced labor allegations in Xinjiang and a range of other issues.

Meanwhile, Taiwan’s Defense Ministry said on its website that four People’s Liberation Army aircraft, including a pair of J-16 fighter jets, [entered its air defense identification zone](#) on Wednesday, skirting close to the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

China frequently lashes out at the US over its backing for Taiwan, saying it amounts to interference in its internal affairs. Xi told Biden in the March call that the issue could “have a disruptive impact on the relationship between the two countries” if it was not properly handled, and has referred to China’s quest to gain control of the democratically ruled island as a “[historic mission](#).”

Earlier this week, Admiral Michael Gilday, the top American naval officer, [said](#) Taiwan must prepare itself against potential Chinese aggression through military deterrence that includes getting the right weapons and training. Gilday said this was the a “big lesson learned and a wakeup call” following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The US has stepped up its backing for Taiwan since the war in Ukraine started, with a group of senior senators including Republican Lindsey Graham visiting last month. China responded to that trip by conducting air and naval training near the island.

Last week, the State Department updated a [Taiwan factsheet](#) posted on its website, dropping a reference to [not supporting](#) the island’s independence, and describing it as “a leading democracy and a technological powerhouse.” It also said Taiwan was a key partner in the [semiconductor industry](#) and “other critical supply chains.”

On Wednesday, more than 50 senators signed a letter urging Biden to include Taiwan as a partner in the proposed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, part of Washington’s efforts to counter China’s clout in Asia. Biden will hold a summit in Tokyo with the leaders of Japan, India and Australia as part of a trip to Asia that begins later this week.

Those four nations form [a grouping known as the Quad](#) that is largely aimed at countering China’s influence.

While the government of President Tsai Ing-wen asserts Taiwan is already a de facto independent nation in need of wider international recognition, Beijing claims it as part of its territory that must be brought under control by force if necessary.

Tsai has played down worries Russia’s invasion could trigger a similar crisis for Taiwan in the near term. One of the reasons for that is the leadership in Beijing wants domestic stability before a [twice-a-decade congress](#) this year that is likely to hand Xi a precedent-defying third term in power.

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HEADLINE	05/19 America’s Covid apathy stress test
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2022/05/19/america-coronavirus-infections-pandemic-vaccines

GIST	<p>America's in the midst of yet another coronavirus surge, setting up a high-stakes test of whether the country really is ready to live with the virus.</p> <p>Between the lines: A third of Americans say the pandemic is over, and the spike in cases hasn't prompted much noticeable policy or behavioral change. But vaccines and therapeutics are now widely available, making the virus much less dangerous — at least for people who have access to and choose to use them.</p> <p>Driving the news: Biden administration officials yesterday said that a third of Americans live in areas where the risk of COVID infection is high enough that they should consider wearing a mask indoors, the NYT reports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But there's no sign that mask mandates are coming back, even in the bluest parts of the country. • New York City Mayor Eric Adams said yesterday that, although the city is considered to be in the high alert level, he's not bringing back mask mandates now. • "If every variant that comes, we move into shutdown thoughts, we move into panicking, we're not going to function as a city," Adams said, per the NYT. <p>The big picture: The virus has killed more than a million people over the last two years. More than 300,000 of those deaths could have been prevented by vaccines, according to a recent analysis.</p> <p>What they're saying: "Beyond the vaccinations and boosting, which are making a very big difference, I think Paxlovid is making a very big difference as well," White House COVID coordinator Ashish Jha told reporters yesterday, pointing to the fact that hospitalizations and deaths aren't rising at the same rate as infections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paxlovid is an oral antiviral that must be taken early on in a patient's coronavirus infection, but has proven to be highly effective. <p>Yes, but: Congress has been gridlocked over new pandemic funding for months, and the administration is warning that it's running out of money to buy more treatments and vaccines.</p> <p>The COVID wave is accelerating across the U.S., with Maine being the only state to report a slight decline in the last two weeks.</p> <p>Why it matters: A 53% jump in cases and a rise in hospitalizations reflects how case growth has moved beyond the Northeast, with metropolitan areas with high vaccination rates increasingly accounting for a higher share of disease spread.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Age of scarcity begins
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/age-scarcity-begins-1-6-040109341.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- The ties that bind the global economy together, and delivered goods in abundance across the world, are unravelling at a frightening pace.</p> <p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's Covid Zero lockdowns are disrupting supply chains, hammering growth and pushing inflation to forty-year highs. They're the chief reasons why Bloomberg Economics has lopped \$1.6 trillion off its forecast for global GDP in 2022.</p> <p>But what if that's just an initial hit? War and plague won't last forever. But the underlying problem — a world increasingly divided along geopolitical fault lines — only looks set to get worse.</p> <p>Bloomberg Economics has run a simulation of what an accelerated reversal of globalization might look like in the longer term. It points to a significantly poorer and less productive planet, with trade back at levels before China joined the World Trade Organization. An additional blow: inflation would likely be higher and more volatile.</p> <p>'Going to Stay'</p>

For investors, a world of nasty surprises on growth and inflation has little to cheer equity or bond markets. So far in 2022, commodities – where scarcity drives prices higher – have been among the big winners, along with companies that produce or trade them. Shares in defense firms have outperformed too, as global tensions soar.

“Fragmentation is going to stay,” says Robert Koopman, the WTO’s chief economist. He expects a “reorganized globalization” that will come with a cost: “We won’t be able to use low-cost, marginal-cost production as extensively as we did.”

For three decades, a defining feature of the world economy has been its ability to churn out ever more goods at ever lower prices. The entry of more than a billion workers from China and the former Soviet bloc into the global labor market, coupled with falling trade barriers and hyper-efficient logistics, produced an age of abundance for many. But the last four years have brought an escalating series of disruptions. Tariffs multiplied during the US-China trade war. The pandemic brought lockdowns. And now, sanctions and export controls are upending the supply of commodities and goods. All of this risks leaving advanced economies facing a problem they thought they’d vanquished long ago: that of scarcity. Emerging nations could see more acute threats to energy and food security, like the ones already causing turmoil in countries from Sri Lanka to Peru. And everyone will have to grapple with higher prices.

A few numbers illustrate the scale of the new barriers.

Tariffs: The trade war saw US charges on Chinese goods rocket up from 3% to about 15% over the course of Donald Trump’s presidency.

Lockdowns: This year’s Covid crackdown in China has put hundreds of billions of dollars in exports at risk, and disrupted supply chains for companies from Apple Inc. to Tesla Inc.

Sanctions: In 1983, the flows of trade subject to export or import bans was only worth about 0.3% of global gross domestic product. By 2019, that share had risen more than fivefold. Sweeping embargoes triggered by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and efforts by countries to secure their own supplies by barring sales abroad — like India’s recent ban on wheat exports — have pushed the figure higher still.

Viewed from one angle, all of this is part of a global rupture that pits Western democracy and free markets against Chinese and Russian authoritarianism. But it’s not necessary to believe in a Manichean struggle between good and evil — or expect the rival camps to separate behind a new iron curtain -- to see the prospective costs.

About \$6 trillion of goods — equivalent to 7% of global GDP — are traded between democratic and autocratic countries. To illustrate the risks of the great unraveling, Bloomberg Economics introduced a 25% tariff on all that traffic into a model of the global economy. That’s equal to the highest rates that the US and China have leveled against each other, and it can stand in for other kinds of friction too, like sanctions and export bans.

The result: global trade plunges by some 20% relative to a scenario without the decoupling — falling back to its levels at the end of the 1990s, before China joined the WTO, as a share of GDP. That’s a huge and wrenching change.

All countries would have to shift resources toward activities they’re less good at. A chunk of the productivity that’s associated with trade would be lost. In the long term, a rollback of globalization to late-1990s levels would leave the world 3.5% poorer than if trade stabilizes at its current share of output, and 15% poorer relative to a scenario of global ties strengthening.

The model shows that another 7% of existing trade relationships would shift between blocks. In concrete terms, that might mean factories making goods for US markets moving from China to, say, India or Mexico.

As that example suggests, there would be winners. But the transition would take time and cause severe bottlenecks along the way, ushering in a period of high and volatile inflation. As Kenneth Rogoff, then a top economist at the International Monetary Fund, warned back in 2003: “The global economy now appears immersed in a long wave of low inflation, but experience suggests that many factors, notably heightened conflict that reverses globalization, can bring it to an end.”

Rival Camps

To be sure, the reality of global fracture is unlikely to play out along quite such clear-cut ideological lines. Still, those numbers provide a sense of what’s at risk.

Democracies can be forgiven for feeling under threat. In 1983, when Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” authoritarian countries accounted for about 20% of global GDP. Fast forward to 2022, and that share has risen to 34%. In the years ahead, with China expected to outgrow the US and Europe, it will edge higher still.

The war in Ukraine shows rival political systems lining up on opposite sides. Chinese President Xi Jinping remains supportive of his Russian ally Vladimir Putin, while Europe and the US are aligned on sanctions for Moscow and military support for Kyiv. It also shows the limits of that framing. India, the world’s most populous democracy, continues to buy Russian oil and weapons. Many other democracies — in Asia, Latin America and elsewhere — show little desire to join the US-led campaign of economic and financial pressure on Russia.

Whether they’re defined by an ideological divide, or simply diverging interests in a multi-polar world, the deepening fault-lines are real. China’s latest Covid lockdowns are a good example of some of their harder-to-predict consequences.

In a world of friendlier great-power relations, Chinese leaders likely would have acquired enough of the effective US-made Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines to give their population a measure of omicron immunity, allowing the economy to reopen. In a world where China is determined to demonstrate its self-sufficiency, and dodge dependence on foreign innovations, they have not.

As a consequence, China’s 1.4 billion population has insufficient protection from the virus. Letting omicron rip could cause 1.6 million deaths, a recent study in the journal *Nature Medicine* found. So Beijing sees little option but to continue with draconian lockdowns. As a result, China is taking a crushing blow to growth. And the rest of the world faces yet more disruption to supply chains, as Chinese factories stall and cargo ships float idle outside Shanghai’s port.

The threat to US and European economies isn’t limited to the repercussions of Chinese lockdowns, or blowback from their own measures against Russia. They could also be exposed to direct retaliation.

China’s 2010 ban on the sale of rare earths – crucial inputs into everything from smart phones to electric-car batteries – to Japan is one example of how export controls can be used by either side. Russia turning off the gas for Poland and Bulgaria is another. If Putin goes further and cuts shipments to Germany, France and Italy too, the result would put 40% of the European Union’s supply at risk, tipping the bloc from Covid recovery into painful recession.

Even in the depths of the US–China trade war, the idea of an extreme rupture between rival geo-political camps seemed far-fetched. The degree of interdependence embodied in the supply chains of companies like Apple appeared too great to disentangle. Some argued that the end of the Trump administration would restore normal relations.

In 2022, with the trade-war tariffs still in place, the Covid crisis adding to pressure to localize supply chains, and Russia locked out of US and European markets, it doesn’t seem so far-fetched.

	The intensity of the current shocks from war and plague will fade. The underlying forces driving deglobalization will not. Brace for a world of lower growth, higher prices, and increased volatility.
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HEADLINE	05/18 Gas stations reprogram pumps for \$10/gal
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10830591/Gas-stations-Washington-reprogram-pumps-prepare-10-gallon-fuel.html
GIST	<p>A national gas station chain is reprogramming its pumps in Washington state to accommodate \$10-a-gallon fuel, it has been revealed.</p> <p>The move by 76 comes as the nation's average gasoline price soars to \$4.57-a-gallon, almost twice the \$2.41 average during Trump's last month in office.</p> <p>A spokesperson for '76' gas stations confirmed that the national chain has begun reconfiguring its pumps to 'make room' for the possibility of double-digit prices, The Post Millennial reported.</p> <p>The spokesperson for '76' did not comment on whether the company is expecting prices to reach \$10.00-a-gallon, The Post Millennial said.</p> <p>Meanwhile, other gas stations in the state have begun running out of gas as supplies become crunched, with reports saying at least 10 stations have run dry.</p> <p>The shortages are mainly effecting regular unleaded and premium gasoline, though diesel supplies are rapidly shrinking too.</p> <p>Meanwhile some states - such as California - are reporting spiraling prices of up to \$5.98 this week.</p> <p>Russia's war in Ukraine is having a dramatic impact on the cost of crude oil - which sits at \$114.20 a barrel.</p> <p>The outlet also reported that a local Facebook group has identified at least 10 Washington gas stations that have run out of fuel, including Exxon and Circle K stations.</p> <p>In January, 2021, the last month of Donald Trump's presidency, gas prices across the nation averaged \$2.41-a-gallon, with some states charging averages under \$2-a-gallon.</p> <p>Those prices have steadily climbed since Biden was elected in November, 2020, skyrocketing earlier this year after Russia invaded the Ukraine. Gas prices are up by at least 27 per cent from the day before Russia began their invasion.</p> <p>The war in Ukraine coupled with rising inflation of 8.3 percent are the main culprits why drivers are spending more than \$100 to fill up on full tank of regular unleaded gas in nearly a third of the country.</p> <p>'Everything is pointing toward even higher prices. We are well on our way toward \$5,' Andy Lipow, president of Lipow Oil Associates, told CNN with prices almost sure to rise higher by Memorial Day, perhaps as high as \$4.75 a gallon.</p> <p>AAA is reporting an average of the average above \$5 a gallon in California, Washington, Nevada and Hawaii, with Oregon not far behind.</p> <p>The average price of gas a year ago was \$3.04 a gallon. Prices were recovering from the pandemic when stay-at-home orders and business shutdowns slashed demand for gasoline.</p> <p>A lack of supply resulted in a gas shortage last summer, sending U.S. gas prices to a seven-year high.</p>

	<p>Lipow believes that gasoline production will ramp up in the coming weeks with more US refineries ending their maintenance season and coming online.</p> <p>Supply is currently at just 97% of 2019 levels.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Gas prices reach new record high
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/gas-prices-new-record-gop-senators-blame-biden
GIST	<p>Average gas prices in the U.S. reached a new record high Thursday, according to AAA's gas price calculator, after Republican senators slammed the Biden administration for a "de facto ban on new drilling."</p> <p>The national average cost of a regular gallon of gasoline hit \$4.589 early Thursday morning. This price topped Wednesday's previous record of \$4.567, which had beat Tuesday's record of \$4.523, which in turn had beat Monday's record of \$4.470.</p> <p>The price comes as the European Union edges toward oil sanctions on Russia amid the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine. It also comes amid record-high inflation, with the consumer price index reaching 8.3% in April, hovering near March's 40-year high. The price hike also follows the Department of the Interior's cancellation of an oil and gas lease sale for over 1 million acres in Alaska's Cook Inlet last week, which DOI attributed to a "lack of industry interest." DOI also canceled two Gulf of Mexico leases.</p> <p>The White House has blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for the record-high gas prices in the U.S., even coining the surge as the "#PutinPriceHike" and vowing that President Biden will do everything he can to shield Americans from "pain at the pump."</p> <p>Biden, last month, announced that the Environmental Protection Agency will allow the sale of E15 gasoline – gasoline that uses a 15% ethanol blend – across the country this summer. Biden has also moved to release 1 million barrels of oil per day from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for the next 6 months. The president is also calling on Congress to make companies pay fees on idled oil wells and non-producing acres of federal lands, aiming to incentivize new production.</p> <p>Yet critics have claimed that Biden's actions on energy policies have created a "supply problem" in the market.</p> <p>Twenty Republican senators, led by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, sent a letter to Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo calling for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to quickly issue permits required to bring additional production online from existing offshore federal oil and gas leases.</p> <p>"While the Biden Administration and Members of Congress fault the domestic oil and gas industry for sitting idle on over 9,000 drilling permits and millions of acres in 'inactive leases', NMFS's permitting delays represent one example of the Administration's de facto ban on new drilling – impeding domestic oil and gas investment, exploration, and production," the senators wrote.</p> <p>The senators attributed the delays to "three administration-made and admitted mistakes" that trace back to mathematical errors in calculating the number of endangered species in the Gulf of Mexico in a 2021 final rule governing offshore oil and gas exploration.</p> <p>"It is unacceptable that agency miscalculations have restricted access to safe, secure, and reliable domestic oil and gas production through substantial, unnecessary, and arbitrary permitting delays," they added.</p> <p>Within his first week in office, Biden signed an executive order temporarily suspending new oil and gas leases on federal lands. The administration resumed the new leasing last month following court challenges against the ban. The administration is appealing a ruling in which Judge James Cain, a Trump appointee, struck down the ban.</p>

	<p>Steve Milloy, a former Trump-Pence EPA transition member and founder of JunkScience.com, blamed the president for a lack of U.S. oil production.</p> <p>"I blame Biden for all lack of production. He has scared away investment," Milloy told FOX Business last week. He suggested that the president will find "any excuse to not drill. They even tried to use the social cost of carbon decision to stop leasing."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 FTC: scammers exploit formula shortage
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/baby-formula-shortage-scams-ftc/
GIST	<p>Scammers are looking to prey on U.S. parents struggling to find baby formula amid a national shortage of the nutritional products, the Federal Trade Commission warned Wednesday.</p> <p>The agency urged consumers scouring the internet for formula to beware of people who claim to be selling brand-name products, but who fail to deliver them after someone makes an online purchase.</p> <p>"Scammers exploiting the high demand for baby formula have sunk to new lows. They're popping up online and tricking desperate parents and caregivers into paying steep prices for formula that never arrives," the FTC said in a statement.</p> <p>In some cases, scammers create fake websites or social media profiles and use name brand logos and product shots to lure customers. They trick consumers into providing payment information for products that they never receive. Others are gouging customers on ecommerce platforms like eBay, charging hundreds of dollars for formula that normally sells for less than \$20.</p> <p>Price gouging — or offering products at well above market rates — violates eBay's policies and is prohibited on the site, a spokesperson told CBS MoneyWatch.</p> <p>"Due to the ongoing shortage, we are stepping up our manual review of listings to protect against price gouging of baby formula," the spokesperson said.</p> <p>How to avoid a scam</p> <p>The FTC urged consumers to research sellers before clicking "buy." Regulators advise doing an internet search using the company's name plus the words "review," "complaint" or "scam" to see if they have been reported in the past.</p> <p>Also consider the payment method you use. Credit card companies often protect customers against scams and can help recoup your money if a product is purchase but never delivered. And the FTC warned that sites that demand payment by gift card, money transfer or in cryptocurrency are scams.</p> <p>Finally, regulators say consumers should use local and known resources. Consult your pediatrician to see if they have formula in stock or sign up for a formula exchange where consumers can request particular products and match with donors who have extra supply.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 US teetering on a recession?
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/recession-us-on-the-horizon/
GIST	<p>With stock markets swooning, inflation running hot and Russia's war in Ukraine devolving into a prolonged stalemate, Americans are understandably worried about their financial prospects and the state of the U.S. economy.</p> <p>The stock market on Wednesday suffered its biggest drop in two years as large retailers acknowledged that rising prices are hurting their profits. Wall Street economists are also sounding the alarm, while a growing number of chief executives and small business owners say they expect a slump later this year.</p>

Although some signs suggest the economy remains on solid ground, other indicators augur trouble. Here's what experts are saying about the risk of a recession.

Why are economists worried?

The economy [unexpectedly shrank](#) in the first three months of the year as U.S. imports rose and exports fell.

More troubling is that the most punishing bout of inflation in decades is starting to affect retail businesses: Industry bellwethers Walmart and Target both reported disappointing earnings this week, saying that higher costs for [food, fuel and transportation](#) reduced their profit margins. Both trimmed their earnings expectations for the year. In another sign consumers are pulling back, Amazon reported its first [quarterly loss](#) in seven years.

As financial markets slide, meanwhile, wealthy people are taking their money out of stocks and stockpiling cash in a move to reduce their exposure to risk. A recent Bank of America survey of investment fund managers found that the portion of investments they have in cash is the highest it's been in the post-September 11 period. The Wells Fargo Investment Institute expects a recession sometime in the next year and is advising investors to put their funds into utilities, seen as more reliable investments.

With technology stocks leading the overall market lower, tech companies that went on a hiring spree in the last two years are abruptly [reversing their hiring plans](#). [Meta](#), Uber and Twitter have slowed or paused hiring, while Netflix, Peloton and Robinhood are laying off workers.

"Decisions to reduce spending, postpone expensive purchases, defer or freeze hiring are all indicators of a potential slowdown," John Kemp, senior market analyst at Reuters, wrote in a recent column. "[I]f there are enough companies and households behaving in the [same] way the likelihood of an imminent slowdown is much higher."

Currently, the odds of a recession are about 30%, according to research from Moody's Analytics and a Wall Street Journal survey of economists.

What could cause a recession?

A major concern is that the [Federal Reserve](#) will raise interest rates too high, too fast, choking off economic growth.

Rising rates curb inflation by making it more expensive to borrow money, which makes it pricier for consumers to spend — especially on big-ticket items like housing and cars — and more costly for businesses to grow and hire workers. But if the Fed miscalculates, sharply rising interest rates could shut off growth, causing a recession.

"If they have to act faster, they could overreact," Alfredo Coutino, director of economic research at Moody's Analytics, told CBS News, alluding to Fed policy makers.

"Because inflation is going to be higher, they will have to raise the interest rates higher. If economic activity is hurt because the Fed is overreacting, the economy is going to decelerate, and we [could] have low growth and high inflation," he said.

Global disruptions stemming from Russia's war in [Ukraine](#) or from COVID-19 shutdowns in China could also reverberate in the U.S., raising the odds of a downturn.

"If we have shortages of raw materials, of agricultural products, because the crop from Ukraine is destroyed by the war, because Russia imposes bans on exports of grains ... or because the zero-COVID policy in China prolongs the disruption in the Chinese economy, the U.S. is going to suffer," Coutino said.

What about "stagflation"?

High consumer prices could also drag down economic growth, creating a "stagflation" situation in which prices are rising faster than businesses can expand. For the economy, that could lead to the worst of both worlds — slower hiring and broader economic activity along with persistent inflation.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen alluded to that possibility on Wednesday, noting that global food prices have shot up to record highs.

"The economic outlook globally is challenging and uncertain," she said. "Higher food and energy prices are having stagflationary effects, namely, depressing output and spending and raising inflation all around the world."

In the U.S., consumer spending is expected to slow later this year if only because many workers' pay hasn't kept up with inflation.

"That raise you got this year — that's already gone," Coutino said. "Of course that is going to limit and restrict your purchasing power, and then guess what, household consumption is going to slow down, and that is going to impose a restriction on the economy."

Still, Coutino sees only a small chance of stagflation, a view shared by most economists. But slowing growth remains a cause for concern.

"A global stagflation scenario similar to that which engulfed the world economy for much of the 1970s still seems unlikely, but the risks of a mild stagflation scenario have clearly been rising in recent weeks," said Andy Cates, senior economist at Haver.

Why could we end up dodging a recession?

While some economic signals are flashing yellow, plenty more suggest the current economic expansion has a ways to run. For instance, Industrial production rose for the fourth month in a row in April, hitting a 15-year high and indicating that supply-chain shortages are fading.

"It is not just consumer spending powering the economy forward," Michael Pearce, senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said in a report.

And consumer spending — which accounts for two-thirds of economic activity — remains strong, with retail sales growing at a healthy pace in April and bank accounts [fatter](#) than they were before the pandemic.

"There's still a fair amount of strength in the consumer," Christopher Rugaber, an economics reporter for the Associated Press, told CBS News. "With strong consumer spending and steady hiring, the economy is in generally good shape for now. And we'll see how it lasts."

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HEADLINE	05/18 Why is there a baby formula shortage?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/18/baby-formula-shortage-why-is-there-none-what-to-do-causes-explained
GIST	<p>As the formula shortage continues to grip the US, many parents have been left struggling to access the product they rely on to feed their babies.</p> <p>At the start of May, 43% of baby formula was out of stock at retailers, according to Datasembly, a product data firm. One mother, speaking to the New York Times, described the situation as “a nightmare”.</p> <p>Here’s a look at how the problem started, what parents can do and what the FDA and government are doing to try to end the shortage.</p> <p>What caused the crisis?</p>

In February, Abbott Laboratories, maker of popular baby formulas, closed a manufacturing facility in Sturgis, Michigan, after it recalled infant formula products when a federal investigation started after four babies taking the formula developed bacterial infections, [two of whom died](#). Abbott [has said](#) there is no link between its formula and the illnesses.

Baby formula was already being affected by [pandemic-related supply chain problems](#), but the Michigan plant closure “really exacerbated things”, said Dr Christopher Duggan, director of the Center for Nutrition at Boston children’s hospital.

Some Republicans have falsely suggested shortages are down to the Biden administration sending baby formula to undocumented immigrants. Steven L Schooner, a professor of government procurement law at George Washington University [told the New York Times](#) that the amount purchased for migrants, “is statistically the equivalent of zero in terms of market share”.

Who has been most affected by the shortages?

Some states are facing more severe shortages, including Tennessee, Texas and Iowa where more than 50% of the top-selling products are out of stock, [according to CBS](#).

The crisis is hitting poorer families disproportionately hard. Nearly half of baby formula in the US is bought under the [Wic program](#), aimed at helping low-income women, infants and children. States give exclusive contract rights for this formula to one company under a bidding process. Abbott provides formula to [about half of the babies](#) receiving Wic benefits. When these products disappeared, families were left scrambling to find alternatives.

There are racial disparities, too. Rates of breastfeeding are lower for Black babies than white babies, according to a [2019 report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Black women are more likely to live at or below the poverty level and more likely to return to work sooner, the report states.

“Those women are less likely to have flexibility in their jobs to be able to pump and express milk,” said Dr Ann Kellams, a University of Virginia faculty pediatrician and board president of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine. “They are the ones I worry most about right now. They are going to be the ones who are less likely to have a relative in a pocket of the US where they still have enough formula on the shelves to send it to them.”

What is the latest advice for people struggling to access formula?

When Kellams talks with families, she explains: “This is a really difficult situation to be in. It’s hard enough to be a parent to a baby, infant or toddler, and it’s OK to use a different brand of formula than you’re used to using.”

For children with a medical condition that is treated with formula, however, parents must talk with their pediatrician or a pediatric registered dietitian to ensure a switch will be safe and well tolerated, said Duggan.

If a mother has been partially breastfeeding and their baby is four months old or younger, there are also ways to boost production but parents should see a lactation consultant or breastfeeding medicine physician, said Kellams, whose organization [published a list of recommendations](#).

Other guidance includes:

- Do not share formula or breastmilk with people online who you don’t know or trust.
- Only put as much formula in a bottle as you think the baby will take because you can always add more.
- Do not dilute formula to maintain supply because it could mean babies don’t get the nutrients they need.

How long are the shortages expected to last and what is the FDA and government doing to help?

Families could soon see some relief. The FDA and Abbott have reached a proposed settlement that would allow the company to reopen the closed Michigan facility, with oversight from an independent expert, [according to the agency](#).

The company [stated](#) it could restart the site within two weeks and that it would then take an additional six to eight weeks before its products are available.

The FDA has also announced a series of measures designed to increase supply. On Monday, the agency [said](#) it would implement processes to make it easier for foreign baby formula manufacturers to sell their products in the US. Currently the US produces about 98% of formula domestically.

The FDA will also, on a case-by-case basis, [ease some of the requirements](#) it puts on formula companies, for example around labeling.

House Democrats have proposed a bill that would provide the FDA with \$28m to address the shortage, according to the [Washington Post](#). But it's unclear if Republicans would support the spending measure.

How many companies make baby formula?

Four companies control about 90% of the [US baby formula market](#) – Abbott (which accounts for nearly half the market), Mead Johnson Nutrition, Nestlé USA and Perrigo. Only 2% of formula is imported and FDA rules make it very hard for new companies to enter the market.

The fact that there are so few companies means that when one factory is shut down, it creates a domino effect, Kellams said. A [letter](#) to the agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack, from eight senators including Cory Booker and Elizabeth Warren stated: “The infant formula industry has reached an alarming level of corporate concentration.”

What could be done to stop this happening again

Some are calling for federal action to tackle the monopoly a handful of companies have on the formula market. Booker, Warren and other senators call for immediate antitrust review in their letter to Vilsack, writing: “This is yet another example of how alarming levels of consolidation hurt American families and can no longer be ignored”

Kellams and Duggan also call for policy changes to better support breastfeeding mothers. The [US is the only industrialized](#) nation that does not mandate paid maternity leave. “It’s very difficult to successfully breastfeed your child and still go back to work,” said Duggan. “There are a lot of things that our government and policy makers could do to support breastfeeding families.”

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HEADLINE	05/18 Covid wave expands to more states
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/latest-covid-19-wave-expands-to-more-of-u-s-11652903321?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>The latest Covid-19 case surge is expanding beyond the Northeast, with places from the Midwest to Florida and California under rising pressure.</p> <p>Fueled by highly contagious versions of the Omicron variant, the tide is posing a test of how much new infections matter in a changing pandemic. Though built-up immunity in the population has kept more people out of hospitals, federal health officials on Wednesday urged people in hot spots to take precautions, from booster shots to pre-gathering tests and masks, to limit the virus’ spread.</p> <p>“We’ve got to do what we can to prevent infections,” said Ashish Jha, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator. “We’ve got to do what we can to ensure that infections don’t turn into severe illness.”</p> <p>The seven-day moving average of new Covid-19 cases recently topped 94,000 a day, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show, nearly four times lows reached in late March. The true number of new</p>

cases is likely significantly higher, epidemiologists say, because so many people are self-[testing at home](#) or not testing at all.

The rise in cases hasn't translated thus far into major surges in [severe illness](#). The seven-day average of confirmed cases in hospitalized patients reached about 18,550 on Wednesday, up from lows near 10,000 in mid-April, but far below a record peak above 150,000 in January. The numbers include people who test positive on routine screening after getting hospitalized for other reasons. The daily average of [reported deaths](#) has slipped under 300 a day, the lowest point since last summer.

But new cases still cause disruptions and carry risks including the possibility of developing long-lasting and sometimes [debilitating symptoms](#), epidemiologists and public-health experts say. The more an outbreak spreads, the more likely it will reach the most vulnerable including elderly people and others with compromised immune systems, the experts say, and the more likely the virus will [continue to mutate](#).

"Vaccines are very effective for reducing severe disease and death but don't eliminate severe disease and death, and so reducing spread, reducing cases is also important," said Julia Raifman, an assistant professor at the Boston University School of Public Health.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky told the WSJ Future of Everything Festival that scientists have yet to determine whether certain variants of the virus are more likely to lead to long-term symptoms.

The latest upswing in cases began in late March [in the Northeast](#), the early hot spot for the Omicron BA.2 subvariant. Virus experts believe spread was muted at first by a mix of [immunity-boosting factors](#): timing, right after a major winter surge, and a similarity to the version of Omicron behind that surge.

A CDC metric that reflects case and hospitalization data to determine community levels of Covid-19 showed 137 counties ranked as "high" in the most recent weekly update on May 12. A week earlier, the number was 79. In mid-April there were only 14 such counties out of more than 3,000 nationally. High community spread means everyone should wear masks in public, indoor places, the CDC says.

An additional 456 counties were recently ranked as "medium" level, where the CDC says people should consider taking precautions based on their own risk. Ms. Walensky said Wednesday that one-third of Americans live in an area where they should consider wearing a mask in public indoor settings or take other prevention measures.

Major population centers like Los Angeles County, New York City and Chicago have been urging people to don face coverings, but also haven't renewed mandates.

Rising hospitalizations tipped New York City's alert level to "high" status on Tuesday. But indicators remain far below this winter's peak. Many local and federal officials say they are more focused on evidence of severe disease and strain on hospitals than cases as a metric for the pandemic's severity. New York Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, said officials remain focused on vaccination and booster shots rather than reinstating mask mandates.

"One thing we're not going to do is use old methods to fight a new war," Mr. Adams said Monday. The city continues to require masks on public transit, and the CDC recommends that people wear masks on public transit nationwide, though it is no longer required.

Several Midwestern states including Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan follow a group of mostly Northeastern states on the ranking of known cases per 100,000 people in the past week, CDC data show. States in other regions, including Florida, have also seen rising case levels.

Ms. Walensky told the WSJ Future of Everything Festival that Covid-19 is here to stay but emphasized that focusing on vaccinations and ensuring immune defenses that keep people out of hospitals are the agency's goal.

	<p>At Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, the biggest challenge from rising local transmission has been staff who are testing positive and have to stay home, said John Segreti, the hospital's medical director of infection prevention and control.</p> <p>The hospital recently had 14 Covid-19 patients compared with a peak of about 145 during the recent winter surge fueled by the Omicron variant, he said. "We're seeing a slight increase in hospitalizations, but not anything close to what we saw with Omicron," Dr. Segreti said.</p> <p>The latest challenge is the BA.2.12.1 subvariant, which early evidence suggests is more transmissible and better able to circumvent built-up defenses. Nearly half of U.S. cases are estimated to be caused by the BA.2.12.1 variant, according to CDC data, with BA.2 being most of the remaining cases.</p> <p>The Biden administration has estimated some 100 million people in the U.S. may become infected this coming fall and winter without added funding to help combat the pandemic and buy new vaccines for a fall booster campaign. The administration earlier this week said households can order a third round of at-home rapid tests, with eight additional tests available per household.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Global economy faces higher inflation
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/high-inflation-slowing-growth-raise-risk-of-global-downturn-11652908756?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>The global economy is in danger of entering a period of so-called stagflation, or high inflation and weak growth, policy makers and corporate leaders say, which could erode living standards around the world.</p> <p>Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Wednesday became the latest leader to warn of turbulence for the global economy. "Certainly the economic outlook globally is challenging and uncertain," Ms. Yellen said in Bonn, Germany, ahead of a meeting of leaders of seven wealthy nations. "Higher food and energy prices are having stagflationary effects, namely, depressing output and spending and raising inflation all around the world."</p> <p>Growing fears of high inflation rippled through financial markets Wednesday after large retailers reported disappointing earnings due in part to their own higher costs. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell more than 1,164 points, or 3.6%, as of 4 p.m. ET in its worst day since 2020. The tech-heavy Nasdaq fell more than 4%. Target Corp. shares sank 25%, putting the company on track for its largest single-day percentage decline since 1987.</p> <p>Ms. Yellen—a former Federal Reserve chairwoman—indicated that inflation, particularly the rising cost of food and energy, is becoming a greater longer-term concern and will be a dominant theme among global leaders in the weeks and months ahead. She added that the strong U.S. economy could help buffer it from the threat.</p> <p>"The United States in many ways is best positioned, I think, to meet this challenge, given the strength of our labor market and the economy," Ms. Yellen said.</p> <p>A day earlier, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell warned that "there could be some pain involved" in the U.S. as the central bank moves to raise interest rates further to tamp down high inflation.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Wells Fargo & Co. CEO Charlie Scharf said this week there was no question that the U.S. is headed for an economic downturn. "It's going to be hard to avoid some kind of recession," Mr. Scharf said Tuesday at The Wall Street Journal's Future of Everything Festival.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Ben Bernanke, also a former Fed leader, raised the possibility of stagflation in an interview published in the New York Times. "Even under the benign scenario, we should have a slowing economy," he said. "And inflation's still too high but coming down. So there should be a period in the next year or two where growth is low, unemployment is at least up a little bit and inflation is still high."</p>

Mr. Bernanke wasn't available to comment, a spokeswoman said.

Inflation fears have risen in recent days because of new pressures that could further push up prices for oil and food from already-high levels. The European Union this week released a plan aimed at ending its dependence on Russian energy within five years. [Rising food prices](#)—also linked to [Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#), a major global producer of crops—are triggering shortages across the developing world. The U.K. government reported this week that inflation hit a 40-year high of 9% in April. That eclipsed inflation in the U.S., which hit 8.3% in April.

Meanwhile, economists have cut their forecasts for global economic growth this year as China and Europe show signs of a slowdown. China reported this week that consumer spending and output fell sharply in April as the government imposed new lockdowns to stem a wave of [Covid-19 infections](#).

Last month, the International Monetary Fund said it sees [the world's economy](#) expanding 3.6% this year, down from 6.1% last year. The most recent forecast was 0.8 percentage point lower than its projection in January and a 1.3 point cut from its October 2021 outlook.

The Bank of England earlier this month warned that the U.K. was likely to enter a recession.

One big factor behind the darkening outlook is signs from the Fed and the European Central Bank of a more hawkish stance to aggressively tackle inflation. The Fed last month raised interest rates by a half-percentage point—the biggest increase since 2000—and is planning additional increases this year.

ECB President Christine Lagarde indicated this month that she would support raising the central bank's main interest rate in July, which would mark the first such increase in more than a decade. Higher interest rates mean that the cost of borrowing—for homes, cars, business expansions and other items—would go up, and could ultimately force consumers and firms to cut back, slowing inflation but also economic growth.

Even if the global economy avoids recession, many people could feel like they are in one, economists say. With the cost of living rising faster than most workers' paychecks, consumers are getting less and less for each dollar they spend. Five dollars spent at the local cafe might get them a medium coffee instead of a large, for instance. Three hundred dollars spent on airfare might get someone from San Francisco to Denver, but not to Chicago.

Americans accumulated savings during the pandemic, as many reduced expenses and received government stimulus. That is now reversing. The saving rate fell in March to the lowest in nine years, according to the Commerce Department. Households are increasingly pulling out their credit cards and spending down their savings to keep up. Americans' debt loads rose quickly in the year through March after stalling earlier in the pandemic, [the latest Fed data show](#). As interest rates rise, monthly payments on that debt would further eat into household finances, economists say.

For now, the fundamentals of the U.S. economy are solid, with households still in a strong position financially as more people get jobs and return to old habits like traveling, dining out and going to concerts. [Sales at American retailers](#)—a big chunk of consumer spending, the biggest source of economic activity in the U.S.—rose in April for the fourth straight month, the Commerce Department said this week. April's unemployment rate of 3.6% remained just a shade above the 50-year low set just before the pandemic. [Job openings across the U.S.](#) reached a record high of 11.5 million in March.

But the risk of a recession has risen in recent weeks, and certain problems—such as supply chains disrupted by Covid-19 lockdowns in China and the Ukraine war—could be largely beyond the ability of central banks to address.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at the consulting firm Grant Thornton LLP, said one risk is that persistently high inflation would ultimately cause consumers to cut spending and businesses to slow hiring to maintain

	<p>profit margins. If that happens, there would, for a period at least, be high inflation and rising unemployment—a combination generally known as stagflation that defined the 1970s, when oil shocks, high federal spending and loose monetary policy caused inflation to soar.</p> <p>Unemployment could rise, as could homelessness, Ms. Swonk said. People could be forced to move in with parents and relatives and do away with healthcare, not to mention vacations and dinner outings.</p> <p>“Inflation erodes living standards, and especially the kind of inflation we’re talking about—of basic needs—food and shelter and energy, the three pillars of existence,” Ms. Swonk said. “That kind of inflation is an incredible threat to the economy. We’re talking about a humanitarian crisis on top of what’s already been a pandemic and a war in continental Europe.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 SPD chief: full compliance consent decree
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-chief-seattle-police-maintained-full-and-effective-compliance-with-consent-decree
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The Seattle Police Department has maintained compliance with federal reform guidelines for two years, a major milestone for the department, according to police chief Adrian Diaz.</p> <p>For a decade, SPD has been under the thumb of a consent decree – federal oversight requiring the department to reform policing tactics. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice found officers frequently used excessive force, failed to deescalate interactions and failed to properly assist people in mental health crises, all without facing consequences.</p> <p>Since then, the department has been required to reform their practices, and in 2018 were found to be in full compliance with the consent decree. This moved them to the second phase, where they had to sustain compliance for two years.</p> <p>There were stumbles around 2020, including the police response to the George Floyd protests, police union contracts that walked back certain reforms, and the city’s decision to file a motion to dismiss the consent decree – then their move to drop the dismissal less than a year later.</p> <p>According to a recent assessment from the Federal Court Monitor, SPD has maintained "full and effective compliance" under the consent decree.</p> <p>Police Chief Adrian Diaz said it is the first department "in the new era of consent decrees" to reach this milestone.</p> <p>"We thank the Monitor, the court, the Department of Justice, and the many in Seattle’s diverse communities who have challenged and supported us," said Diaz. "Yet while we celebrate this achievement and look forward to completing the remaining commitments outlined in the Monitoring Plan for this year, we also remain mindful that this is by no means an endpoint."</p> <p>Diaz said as SPD moves into next stage of the consent decree, the department is focusing on officer wellness reforms and training programs.</p> <p>"For any organization, reform should be an ever-evolving process," said Diaz, "and just as the massive calls for change and accountability in policing in 2020 and the continuing impacts of the pandemic have informed our approach to crowd management, deployment, and staffing efficiency, we pledge our continuing commitment to ensure that a culture of ongoing review and reform remains cemented in the DNA of this department."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 CDC urges indoor masking amid surge
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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/cdc-urges-indoor-masking-again-as-covid-cases-rise-nationwide-mask-mandate-masks-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-rochelle-walensky-coronavirus-variants-subvariants-omicron
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — A new forecast from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts thousands more people could die from COVID-19 by this time next month as cases continue to increase nationwide.</p> <p>CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said during a White House press briefing on Wednesday that there has been a steady increase in positive cases across the country for the past five weeks, including a 26% increase in the last week. Hospitalizations also are rising, up 19% in the past week.</p> <p>Officials say that much of this depends on several factors, including how well previous infections can protect against new subvariants.</p> <p>The agency predicts that deaths could go up by about 80 people a day, adding up to 11,000 deaths within the next month. The CDC also expects hospitalizations to increase in June.</p> <p>Those predictions come as the CDC says more than 32% of people in the U.S. live in areas with medium or high COVID community levels. The agency is once again encouraging people who are in the hardest-hit areas to wear a mask in indoor public spaces.</p> <p>"In areas with medium COVID-19 community levels, in yellow, individuals should consider taking prevention measures based on their own risk, like avoiding crowds, wearing a mask, increasing their testing, especially before gathering with others indoors," Walensky said.</p> <p>The CDC says right now, just over 4% of U.S. counties have high COVID-19 community levels.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Cascade volcanoes: 'there's lots of chatter'
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/tech/science/environment/pacific-northwest-volcanoes/293-3e4c1c92-e9f1-46ad-a37b-c8c16c828629
GIST	<p>SKAMANIA COUNTY, Wash. — For thousands and thousands of years, the Pacific Northwest has had a history of active volcanism. And on May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens violently erupted. Many in central and eastern Washington remember the day vividly.</p> <p>And while that's the most recent volcano to erupt in our lifetime, several of the tall mountain peaks such as Mt. Rainier, Glacier Peak, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Shasta are still active volcanoes. And all these volcanoes up and down the Cascades are being closely monitored by the United States Geological Survey (USGS).</p> <p>"They're not these quiet, stately monoliths just sitting there. There's lots of chatter and talking going on and we're monitoring all of that. And we're trying to understand what is typical background. Because there what we want to be able to understand and pick up early is what abnormal, what's unusual in that monitoring," says Jon Major, the Scientist in charge at the USGS Cascades Volcano Observatory.</p> <p>Learning from Mount St. Helens</p> <p>While there are emergency plans in place for future eruptions, the volcano's history and its behavior is also being uncovered. For example, the massive landslide that was documented at Mount St. Helens was thought to be unique and unusual. But after the event, scientists learned that landslides and changes to the local geography has happened several times for many active volcanoes in the region.</p> <p>"The landslide we saw at Mount St. Helens, that's happened at Mt. Rainier, that's happened at Mt. Hood, that's happened at Mt. Shasta. So all the processes we saw that morning have happened at all our other volcanoes."</p>

But the "Lateral Blast" of the 1980 eruption remains a defining feature of Mount. St. Helens' most recent eruption.

Mt. Mazama's catastrophic eruption

And while that eruption left a layer of ash across the Inland Northwest, this was nothing compared to one of the most catastrophic volcanic eruptions the Pacific Northwest has ever seen.

"All we have to do is go back roughly 7,000 years to Crater Lake."

"Mt. Mazama is known for a massive catastrophic eruption."

An eruption so large that the mountain peak itself collapsed after the magma and gasses were released - leaving the caldera that's now Crater Lake behind. And 7700 years later, a huge layer of ash was discovered in Spokane County, where Andy Buddington was able to study this incredible observation.

"Now we have 71 cm of ash documented out at Saltese. The thickness of the ash can become overthickened, but nonetheless, we were able to correlate it to Mt. Mazama," Buddington said.

Shaped by volcanic eruptions

Pacific Northwest volcanoes will continue to be a part of our past and future. But as the mountains rest, there is a beauty left behind.

"The Palouse region is underlain by a special type of soil known as loess soil. And with these periodic eruptions of ashy material which is enriched in many different chemical elements, help kind of fertilize the soli, reinvigorate the soil with essential nutrients."

The USGS remains up to date with their computer modeling regarding what would happen if a 1980s magnitude eruption would happen today. The site is updated daily. You can see what it looks like [here on the USGS website](#).

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HEADLINE	05/18 Aggressive parents behind referee shortage
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/its-getting-worse-its-terrible-aggressive-parents-are-causing-a-referee-shortage-in-wa
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - If you have kids in youth sports, you've probably seen some confrontations on the field or the court.</p> <p>Referee associations locally and nationally say it is leading to a crisis in youth sports, and contributing to a massive shortage of officials right now. It's also sparking a push for new laws to protect referees.</p> <p>72-year-old Peyton Coffin is a veteran referee pushing for those new laws. He is still recovering from what he calls a brutal attack by a parent during an 8th grade basketball game at Kenmore Middle School.</p> <p>"I had my back to the bleachers," said Coffin. "I wasn't within five feet of his son. He singled me out because I was wearing a striped shirt."</p> <p>The game was over and Coffin was trying to break up a scuffle between players when a parent stormed out of the stands and slammed into him.</p> <p>"He runs across the court and puts his left elbow in my back, hard enough to break two ribs. I slammed down on the court, broke a nose, and fractured my cheek," Coffin recalled.</p> <p>31-year-old father Mark McLaughlin was eventually arrested and charged with assault and is currently awaiting his trial.</p>

Coffin says it's the worst thing he's suffered in nearly 20 years as a referee, but it's certainly not the first confrontation.

"We've been chested up, we've been shoved, and we've had people come by our cars afterward and berate us."

Lezley Smith, the president of the Pacific Northwest Basketball Officials Association, who has also been a referee since the 90s, says confrontations at games, both verbal and physical, are on the rise. "It's getting worse," said Smith. "It's terrible."

She says it's one of the reasons, along with the pandemic, that there is a shortage of youth sports officials right now.

The Washington Officials Association says it is [down 800 sports officials](#), making it hard to cover all the games.

According to the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA), over the last year, there have been 508 player and coach ejections from games, nearly double the amount of the previous two years, though 2020-21 was a shortened season, due to the pandemic.

"Officiating is a way to stay involved in the game and that's why a lot of people do it," said Smith. "But if you're at your job and someone is yelling at you, would you want to stay doing that? And so for officials, no they don't."

The National Federation of State High School Associations says 50,000 high school refs have quit since 2019, and just last week the CEO, Karissa Niehoff, spoke out about abuse aimed at refs, saying the culture has to change.

"The boorish behavior of fans who attend sporting events is being normalized, and in fact encouraged. The issue has become so serious, that many states are proposing legislation to protect sports officials from assaults," said Niehoff.

Currently, there are 22 states, including Oregon, where there are specific charges for touching an official.

Washington is not one of them, but that could be changing.

Referee associations in the northwest are [currently planning to push lawmakers for new legislation to protect refs](#), an effort Coffin is now involved in when he isn't on the court or the field.

He says he won't let one terrible incident keep him from doing something he loves.

"Tonight, I've got the baseball semi-finals for the metro that's going to be a great game. These kids have worked hard all year."

He is also actively recruiting people to become sports officials to make up for the dwindling numbers, something the WIAA is also doing by offering high school athletes free training to try to recruit young officials to the games.

Coffin's message to parents, coaches, and fans is to come to the game and cheer on their athletes, but leave the refs alone.

"Let us do our jobs and if you don't like a call that's fine, but it's not a bad call, and there's a pretty good chance I had a better angle on it than you did."

HEADLINE	05/19 Russians out, Kharkiv residents return
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/world/europe/i-could-not-stay-away-with-russians-pushed-back-residents-return-to-kharkiv.html
GIST	<p>Family members clutched one another in joy at Kharkiv railway station on Tuesday as relatives who had fled the bombardment of the city arrived on the train from the capital, Kyiv.</p> <p>Daryna Mostyvska, 25, greeted her mother with flowers, but was first handed a wriggling bundle of fur, her dog, C.J., before her mother could climb down from the train with her bags and the family cat.</p> <p>Her mother, Lyudmyla Mostyvska, a 50-year-old first aid medic, had been away for nearly a month. “I missed it,” the older woman said. “I could not stay away. My heart was breaking.”</p> <p>Her daughter, a lawyer, had joined a volunteer group and stayed in the city throughout its months under heavy bombardment, which began in the opening days of the war.</p> <p>Kharkiv, once Ukraine’s second-largest city, was almost encircled by Russian forces and came under daily assault for two months until a Ukrainian counteroffensive in recent weeks pushed the attacking forces away.</p> <p>The retreat of Russian forces to about 20 miles from the city has brought a respite from constant artillery fire, and up to 2,000 people have been returning every day by train from central and western Ukraine, where they had taken shelter.</p> <p>“I did not give her permission to come back,” Ms. Mostyvska’s daughter said, laughing, as her mother kissed her. “In Ukraine, nowhere is safe and every day it can change, any time. But thanks to our Ukrainian forces it is more secure now.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Day 85 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/19/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-85-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskyy used his nightly address to say that Russia’s alleged use of laser weapons systems “indicates the complete failure of the invasion” and that mistakes had been made at the highest level. He compared their use to propaganda efforts by Nazi Germany promoting a “wunderwaffe” or “wonder weapon”. Russia has claimed it is using a new generation of laser weapons to burn up drones. Zelenskyy said he had signed a decree to extend martial law by 90 days in order to allow further time to expel invasion forces. The decree needs to be approved by parliament. The World Bank will make \$30bn available to help stem a food security crisis threatened by Russia’s war in Ukraine, which has cut off most grain exports from the two countries. The total will include \$12bn in new projects and over \$18bn funds from existing food and nutrition-related projects that have been approved but have not yet been disbursed, the bank said. Financial markets have endured another torrid day amid concerns that the war in Ukraine, along with inflation and supply problems, was pushing the world towards recession. In the US the Dow Jones average closed down 3.57% while the broader S&P500 suffered its worst session since June 2020, plunging 4.04%. A Russian tank commander has pleaded guilty to shooting dead a civilian on a bicycle, in Ukraine’s first trial for war crimes committed during the Russian invasion. Vadim Shysimarin, 21, has been accused of firing his AK-47 at a 62-year-old man from the window of a car in the north-eastern Sumy region in late February. Sweden and Finland have formally submitted their applications to join the Nato military alliance. The Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, accepted the Nordic neighbours’ membership applications. The United States will work with Finland and Sweden in the event of the ‘threat of aggression’ while the two countries’ Nato membership is being considered, president Joe Biden said.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said Sweden should not expect to approve its Nato application without returning 'terrorists'. Ankara has accused Sweden and Finland of harbouring people it says are linked to groups it considers terrorists. A spokesperson for Erdoğan later said progress on Finland and Sweden's Nato membership bids will only be possible if concrete steps are taken to address Turkey's national security concerns. • The European Commission has proposed an extra €9bn (£7.6bn) in EU loans to Ukraine to keep the country running as well as a €210bn plan for Europe to end its reliance on Russian fossil fuels by 2027. Zelenskiy said the €9bn support package would "help Ukraine win the war, overcome the consequences of Russian forces' aggression and accelerate the movement towards EU membership". • Russia has expelled a total of 85 diplomatic staff from France, Spain and Italy in response to similar moves by those countries, its foreign ministry said. It said it was ordering out 34 embassy staff from France, 27 from Spain and 24 from Italy. • The US embassy in Kyiv has resumed operations, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said after nearly three months of closure. A small number of diplomats will return initially to staff the embassy, according to a spokesperson. • Russian forces occupying parts of north-eastern Ukraine early in the war subjected civilians to summary executions, torture, and other grave abuses that are apparent war crimes, Human Rights Watch said. The rights organisation documented 22 apparent summary executions, nine other unlawful killings, six possible enforced disappearances and seven cases of torture across 17 villages and small towns in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. • At least 10 Ukrainian civilians, including two children, were killed by Russian forces Donetsk, regional governor Pavlo Kirilenko said. A further seven people had been injured, he said.
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HEADLINE	05/19 UN: war in Ukraine stokes global food crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/19/ukraine-war-has-stoked-global-food-crisis-that-could-last-years-says-un
GIST	<p>The United Nations has warned that the war in Ukraine has helped to stoke a global food crisis that could last years if it goes unchecked, as the World Bank announced an additional \$12bn in funding to mitigate its "devastating effects".</p> <p>UN secretary general António Guterres said shortages of grain and fertiliser caused by the war, warming temperatures and pandemic-driven supply problems threaten to "tip tens of millions of people over the edge into food insecurity", as financial markets saw share prices fall heavily again on fears of inflation and a worldwide recession.</p> <p>Speaking at a UN meeting in New York on global food security, he said what could follow would be "malnutrition, mass hunger and famine, in a crisis that could last for years", as he and others urged Russia to release Ukrainian grain exports.</p> <p>He said he was in "intense contact" with Russia and other countries to try to find a solution. "The complex security, economic and financial implications require goodwill on all sides for a package deal to be reached," he said of his discussions with Moscow, Ukraine, Turkey, the US, the European Union and others. "I will not go into details because public statements could undermine the chances of success."</p> <p>Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and international economic sanctions on Russia have disrupted supplies of fertiliser, wheat and other commodities from both countries, pushing up prices for food and fuel, especially in developing nations. Together the warring nations produce 30% of the world's wheat.</p> <p>Before the invasion in February, Ukraine was seen as the world's bread basket, exporting 4.5m tonnes of agricultural produce per month through its ports – 12% of the planet's wheat, 15% of its corn and half of its sunflower oil.</p>

But with the ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and others cut off from the world by Russian warships, the supply can travel only on congested land routes that are far less efficient.

Prices have skyrocketed. The UN's food and agricultural price index [reached an all-time high of almost 160 points](#) in March before falling 1.2 or 0.8% in April. Cereal and meat price indices also hit record highs in March. A year ago wheat was trading in Chicago at US\$674c per bushel. Today it fetches US\$1,242c per bushel in a near-doubling of the price driven and compounded by the lack of supply.

"Let's be clear: there is no effective solution to the food crisis without reintegrating Ukraine's food production," Guterres said. "Russia must permit the safe and secure export of grain stored in Ukrainian ports."

US secretary of state Antony Blinken, who chaired the summit, echoed the call along with World [Food](#) Programme head David Beasley. Beasley said: "The world is on fire. We have solutions. We need to act and we need to act now."

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HEADLINE	05/18 Russia: 900 Mariupol fighters sent to prison
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/18/ukraine-mariupol-azovstal-soldiers-russia
GIST	<p>More than 900 Ukrainian troops who were at Mariupol's besieged Azovstal steel plant have been sent to a prison colony on Russian-controlled territory, Moscow has said, as their fate remains uncertain.</p> <p>A foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, said on Wednesday evening that of the 959 Ukrainian service personnel Russia said had surrendered since Tuesday, 51 were being treated for their injuries and the remainder had been sent to a former prison colony in the town of Olenivka in a Russian-controlled area of Donetsk region.</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry also released videos on Wednesday of what it said were Ukrainian fighters receiving hospital treatment in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk after surrendering at the besieged Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol.</p> <p>In the videos, a group of men were shown lying on beds in a room, and two spoke briefly to the camera. In one, a soldier said he was being treated "normally", adding that he was not being psychology pressured. It was not possible to establish if the soldier was speaking freely.</p> <p>Zakharova told journalists all the wounded Azovstal soldiers "will be provided with qualified medical care".</p> <p>Ukraine has not commented on Russia's latest update. In his address to the nation late on Tuesday, the president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said an "evacuation mission" was continuing with help from "the most influential international mediators". It is also not clear how many remain inside the plant.</p> <p>Denis Pushilin, the head of the self-proclaimed republic of Donetsk, said on Wednesday that the "commanders of the highest level" were still hiding in the plant. Earlier, Ukrainian officials had said some of its soldiers remained.</p> <p>The two sides in the war have released practically no details of the agreement that led to the surrender of the troops, who were holed up for weeks in an extensive network of tunnels and bunkers underneath the steelworks.</p> <p>Ukraine's deputy defence minister said on Tuesday the soldiers would be swapped in a prisoner exchange, but a number of Russian officials on Wednesday repeated statements made a day earlier by other hardliners that the soldiers should be tried. Pushilin on Wednesday called on an "international tribunal" to be set to decide the soldiers' "fate".</p>

“As for war criminals as well as those who are nationalists, their fate, if they laid down their arms, should be decided by the courts,” he said. “If the enemy has laid down arms, then his fate will be decided by the courts. If it is a Nazi criminal, then it’s a tribunal.”

The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, whose forces have participated in the battle for Mariupol, said the Azov regiment, one of the main forces defending the steelworks, should not be exchanged and “must be punished by law”.

Speaking at an educational forum in Moscow, Kadyrov said Russian forces were facing some “difficulties” in Ukraine as a result of Nato arms deliveries to the country. It was the second statement by a Russian official on Wednesday that acknowledged some of the Russian military failings in Ukraine after Rashid Nurgaliyev, the deputy secretary of the Russian security council, said that “despite all the current difficulties, the special operation will be completed”.

The Azov regiment was formed in 2014 as a volunteer militia to fight Russia-backed forces in east Ukraine, and many of its original members had far-right extremist views. Since then, the unit has been integrated into the Ukrainian national guard and its commanders say it has moved away from its far-right origins.

The Russian Duma is expected to discuss the subject this week and potentially accept a new resolution that would ban prisoner exchanges of Azov fighters. Next week, Russia’s supreme court will also hear an application to designate Ukraine’s Azov regiment as a “terrorist organisation”, opening the way for sentences of up to 20 years for those convicted of involvement.

Russia’s Investigative Committee, which exists to examine major crimes, has already announced plans to interrogate the surrendered soldiers, without indicating whether they would be treated as suspects.

The fate of the forces taken prisoner at Azovstal could further complicate efforts to resume peace negotiations, with both sides blaming each other for a breakdown in talks.

The Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, accused Ukraine of a “total lack of desire” to continue the negotiations, while the Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said talks were on hold.

The Azov movement has been used as a key part of the Russian propaganda narrative to justify the war in Ukraine, and Andrei Kolesnikov of the Carnegie Moscow Center said Russian politicians were using their surrender “to promote themselves and show their loyalty to the Kremlin”.

“But ultimately, their statements don’t matter much and it will be Putin who decides what happens to the Ukrainian soldiers,” Kolesnikov added. He said what Putin chose to do with the Azovstal soldiers could point to his current intentions in the conflict. “If he decides to try the soldiers, it will be a clear, worrying sign that he is willing to further escalate the situation. It will be a spit in Zelenskiy’s face.”

Alternatively, Kolesnikov said, trading soldiers with Ukraine would be framed domestically as a Russian “act of mercy and compassion” despite the current calls by Putin’s hardliners demanding severe punishment for the soldiers. “At home, Putin has flexibility and could play both cards,” Kolesnikov said.

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HEADLINE	05/18 US soccer historic agreement
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/may/18/us-womens-and-mens-teams-agree-equal-share-of-world-cup-prize-money
GIST	The US men’s and women’s soccer teams will share prize money from their respective World Cups equally in a historic agreement announced on Wednesday.

US Soccer and the unions for the two teams reached the deal during negotiations for their new collective bargaining agreements, which have now been ratified.

“The accomplishments in this CBA are a testament to the incredible efforts of WNT players on and off the field,” said USWNT player and USWNT players’ association president Becky Sauerbrunn. “The gains we have been able to achieve are both because of the strong foundation laid by the generations of WNT players that came before the current team and through our union’s recent collaboration with our counterparts at the [men’s players union] and leadership at US Soccer.

“We hope that this agreement and its historic achievements in not only providing for equal pay but also in improving the training and playing environment for national team players will similarly serve as the foundation for continued growth of women’s soccer both in the United States and abroad.”

USMNT defender Walker Zimmerman, who is a member of the men’s union leadership group, also welcomed the deal. “There are tough conversations, but at the end of the day, it is the right thing to do,” Zimmerman said. “It’s something that [the US women’s team players] deserve. It’s something that they have fought for so hard, and, to be honest, sometimes it does feel like we had just kind of come alongside of them and had been a little late.”

Fifa’s prize money for the men’s and women’s World Cups is unequal. The bonus pool for this year’s men’s World Cup in Qatar is \$440m, while the prize money for the women’s tournament in Australia in 2023 is \$60m. Under the new agreement, the unions for the US men’s and women’s teams will share the prize money from the 2022 and 2023 World Cups. The US men have already qualified for Qatar 2022, while the women’s team are the reigning women’s champions and are heavy favourites to book their place for Australia 2023 later this summer.

World Cup prize money was not the only area where equal deals were reached. Shares of ticket sales will now be equal, as will win bonuses. Some aspects of income and benefits will differ between the teams.

The men will not share their \$2.5m bonus for qualifying for this year’s World Cup as it was part of the their previous CBA.

“This is a truly historic moment. These agreements have changed the game forever here in the United States and have the potential to change the game around the world,” said US Soccer president Cindy Parlow Cone, who is also a former USWNT player. “US Soccer and the USWNT and USMNT players have reset their relationship with these new agreements and are leading us forward to an incredibly exciting new phase of mutual growth and collaboration as we continue our mission to become the preeminent sport in the United States.”

The US women’s team has long fought for equal treatment with the men’s team. In December 2020 [they reached an agreement](#) with US Soccer over equal work conditions with their male counterparts. The players were granted the same conditions as the US men’s team in areas such as travel, hotel accommodation, the right to play on grass rather than artificial turf, and staffing. Then, in February, the team [agreed a \\$24m settlement](#) that ended a six-year legal battle over equal pay.

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HEADLINE	05/19 Spike in conflicts, record in displacements
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/19/huge-spike-in-global-conflict-caused-record-number-of-displacements-in-2021
GIST	Conflict and violence forced people from their homes a record number of times last year, a report has found, with sub-Saharan Africa bearing the brunt of mass internal displacement caused by “huge spikes” in fighting.

People fleeing violence were internally displaced 14.4m times in 2021, an increase of 4.6m on 2020, according to [figures published](#) by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

Most of those displacements – 11.6m, or 80% of the total – took place in sub-Saharan African countries, with the war in northern Ethiopia dwarfing other conflicts in terms of the number of times people were forced from their homes.

Alexandra Bilak, IDMC director, said the geographic concentration of the conflict-related displacement across sub-Saharan Africa, from the Sahel to east Africa, was a huge concern. “These are, of course, countries that have experienced long histories of conflict, but what these numbers show is that the conflicts are far from having been resolved,” she said.

“So on top of protracted crises, you get new waves of violence every year. In Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, we’re talking huge spikes of new violence that have led to incredibly large numbers being displaced and, at least for now, very little prospect for returns.”

New flare-ups of violence often collided with climate pressures such as drought or flooding, and resulting food insecurity, making it even harder for countries to give internally displaced people (IDPs) the help they needed, she said.

“There’s absolutely no window during which some kind of stabilisation could happen, and some degree of return or sustainable local integration. These constant shocks to the system mean that the numbers keep increasing.”

According to the report, there were 59.1 million IDPs globally in 2021, a cumulative figure, which has grown steadily since the IDMC began documenting [in 2003](#). Every year more displacement is caused by natural disasters than conflict, but last year the number of forced movements due to disasters such as such as storms, floods and volcanic eruptions – 23.7 million – was down considerably on 2020.

The number of times people were forced from their homes by violence was of particular concern to the IDMC. As the report deals with 2021, the figures do not include the huge humanitarian fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where [more than 7 million people are thought to be internally displaced](#).

The only place to rival that scale of displacement was Ethiopia, where conflict – chiefly [war between government forces and Tigrayan rebels](#) in the north of the country – triggered 5.1m internal displacements. Until the invasion of Ukraine, that was the highest annual figure ever recorded for a single country.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which saw [2.7m displacements due to conflict](#), and Afghanistan, where the Taliban toppled Ashraf Ghani’s government, also registered all-time highs. The [volatile situation in Myanmar](#), where the military staged a bloody coup, helped triple the overall figure for east Asia compared with the previous year.

With more than half the global IDP population under 25, and about 25 million under 18, the IDMC called for more targeted interventions to protect children and young people from the particular dangers they face.

“The financial difficulties IDPs tend to face may force children to engage in dangerous income-generating activities, including crime, transactional sex or joining armed groups,” the report notes. “Strengthening child protection systems that consider these risks is essential.”

Displaced girls and boys, it adds, confront different risks, with girls at greater risk of sexual violence and [child marriage](#), and boys of recruitment by fighters.

Bilak hoped the report would raise awareness of the worsening plight of IDPs, which historically had received “much less attention” from governments and policymakers than that of refugees or migrants.

	<p>“This is, first and foremost, a call for acknowledgment of the scale ... and the urgency of the issue,” she said.</p> <p>Faced with the stark increase in conflict-related displacement, she added, the IDMC urged greater investment in peace-building, “and in preventing those conflicts from happening in the first place”.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 CDC recommends Covid test before travel
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/traveling-this-summer-cdc-recommends-everyone-test-for-covid-19-in-days-before-flying/
GIST	<p>If you are traveling internationally or within the U.S. this summer, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends you test for COVID-19 in the days before flying.</p> <p>The agency’s recommendation for all travelers regardless of vaccination status came in an update to its COVID-19 testing website on May 16.</p> <p>“Consider getting tested as close to the time of departure as possible (no more than 3 days) before your trip” when heading to any destination, the CDC said.</p> <p>Before the update, the CDC’s recommendation did not include domestic travelers considered up-to-date on their vaccines, according to CNN.</p> <p>The agency still recommends wearing masks when using public transportation, but doing so is no longer enforced as of April 18.</p> <p>Here’s what you should know ahead of the “busy summer travel season,” which begins in late May and lasts for three months, according to the Transportation Security Administration.</p> <p>Domestic travelers</p> <p>In the U.S., COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are on the rise, according to the CDC.</p> <p>“Check your destination’s COVID-19 situation before traveling,” the agency says on its domestic travel website.</p> <p>COVID-19 transmission rates throughout the country can be checked on the CDC’s COVID-19 Community Level interactive map, which displays infections by counties.</p> <p>Most of the country, 81%, is in an area with a low COVID-19 community level as of May 17, according to the CDC. Meanwhile, roughly 14% live in an area with medium COVID-19 community levels, and about 4% live where the levels are considered high.</p> <p>“If traveling to an area with high or medium COVID-19 Community Levels, and you are, live with, or are visiting someone with a weakened immune system or at increased risk for severe disease, plan to take steps to prevent getting sick,” the CDC advises.</p> <p>The majority of the Northeast is considered a medium or high region as of May 17, according to the map. Additionally, the CDC is reminding domestic travelers that “state, tribal, local, and territorial governments may have travel restrictions in place.” More information on this can be found here.</p> <p>Before returning home after traveling within the U.S., the CDC advises to get tested “if your trip involved situations with greater risk of exposure” to COVID-19.</p> <p>U.S. residents traveling internationally</p> <p>For people flying outside the U.S., COVID-19 requirements can differ by country, and the CDC recommends becoming familiar with your destination’s rules.</p>

	<p>“Countries may have their own entry and exit requirements,” the agency said on its international travel website.</p> <p>The CDC says to check an international destination’s COVID-19 levels before flying.</p> <p>When returning to the U.S., travelers 2 years and older are required to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test or “documentation of recovery from COVID-19 in the past 90 days,” according to the agency.</p> <p>The COVID-19 test must be completed “no more than 1 day before travel.”</p> <p>For international travelers not considered up-to-date on vaccines, the CDC recommends quarantining for five days after getting home.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 June has 3 ‘state parks free days’
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article261563717.html
GIST	<p>The month of June has three “state parks free days,” more than any other month. On June 11 for National Get Outdoors Day, June 12 for Free Fishing Day and June 19 for Juneteenth, you can access all Washington State Parks without paying an entry fee.</p> <p>In general, our Western Washington state parks are lowland and coastal, while mountainous higher-elevation public land lies in federal hands or with the Department of Natural Resources. That means beaches, forts, islands, lighthouses, bays and coastal forests are all fair game for the free days. Not a bad trade-off.</p> <p>When it’s not a free day, visiting a state park costs \$10 for a one-day pass. But yearlong access is a good deal: The annual Discover Pass is just \$30. Passes can be purchased online at store.discoverpass.wa.gov, over the phone at 866-320-9933, in-person at 80 retailers across the state (REI is a reliable choice) and from automated pay stations at all of the parks below except for Sequim Bay.</p> <p>Here are six parks that showcase the wealth of variety in state parks offerings. Check them out during the free days this June.</p> <p>DASH POINT STATE PARK Dash Point hides in plain sight, straddling King and Pierce Counties on Puget Sound. An easy jaunt from Seattle or Tacoma, the park offers prized waterfront access in the most heavily populated corner of the state. There’s an ample 3,300 feet of beachfront with views of Vashon Island. Skimboarders in particular take advantage of the low tide shallows to zip along in just a few inches of water above the sand. If you need a break from the beach, there are 11 miles of forested trails in the upland portion of the park. With 114 campsites, Dash Point makes for an ideal close-to-home camping destination.</p> <p>5700 S.W. Dash Point Road, Federal Way; 253-661-4955.</p> <p>FORT FLAGLER HISTORICAL STATE PARK The “Triangle of Fire” once guarded the entrance to Puget Sound at Admiralty Inlet with a trio of forts that ensured no enemy naval vessel could slip past. All three forts — Worden, Casey and Flagler — are now state parks. Of the three, Fort Flagler on Marrowstone Island is the most out of the way, and thus the quietest. Military buffs will delight at the gun emplacements stationed along the Bluff Trail, while beachcombers can enjoy a long sandy walk, especially at low tide, below the bluff. The Beachcomber Cafe has seaside essentials like ice and beach toys, as well as burgers, sandwiches and coffee. The cafe is popular with campers who can set up near the water’s edge. Olympic Kayak Tours offers guided paddles through the scenic waters of Admiralty Inlet.</p> <p>10541 Flagler Road, Nordland, Jefferson County; 360-385-1259.</p> <p>LIME KILN POINT STATE PARK</p>

For whale watching without the expense and environmental impact of a motorized boat tour, pitch up with your binoculars at Lime Kiln Point State Park on the west side of San Juan Island. Gray, humpback, minke and, yes, orca whales are all known to frequent these waters from spring through fall. Rocky trails hug the cliffs where you can pick out your favorite viewing spot. Check in at the Lime Kiln Interpretive Center for the latest whale sighting reports before you head down to the water's edge. If whales prove elusive, the park's 103-year-old lighthouse is guaranteed to be on display.

1567 West Side Road, Friday Harbor; 360-378-2044.

PEACE ARCH HISTORICAL STATE PARK

"May These Gates Never Be Closed" reads one of the inscriptions on the Peace Arch, a 101-year-old landmark along the westernmost point of the U.S.-Canada border. Sadly, they did close to nonessential travel for over 16 months, dealing a serious blow to our region's shared identity as Cascadia. But for those eager to rekindle cross-border connections, the Peace Arch once again welcomes the "Children of a Common Mother" (another inscription) from both sides of the 49th parallel that separates the two countries. While many glimpse the arch from a car window while crossing the border, the arch anchors a unique state park that's also a British Columbia provincial park. Visitors are allowed to travel freely within the park's boundaries as long as they return to the country from where they arrived. Why stop and stretch your legs? To explore 40 acres of gardens, home to over 200 perennials and 20,000 annuals, as well as lovely views of Semiahmoo Bay and the islands beyond. Don't miss the annual summer sculpture exhibition.

19 A St., Blaine; 360-332-8221.

SEQUIM BAY STATE PARK

Want to maximize your odds of dry weather after our soaker of a winter and spring? This corner of the Olympic Peninsula sits in an exceptional rain shadow, making for one of the driest climates in Western Washington. Trips to Sequim usually entail lavender farms and walks out Dungeness Spit, but this state park tucked into a pleasant bay shouldn't be overlooked. It provides access to the Olympic Discovery Trail, a multi-use recreation trail that stretches 120 miles from Port Townsend to the Pacific, and a plethora of moorage for boaters. The Ramblewood Retreat Center is also located here if you are planning an event with a large group.

269035 Highway 101, Sequim; 360-683-4235.

TWANOH STATE PARK Warm saltwater is a precious commodity in the Pacific Northwest. At Twanoh State Park on Hood Canal, the summer sun does the work to heat up the shallow waters. Locals have known this tip for a long while: Twanoh became a state park in 1923. With such an old vintage, the park is also a treat for architecture buffs who are fans of the rustic style of park shelters built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. When the tide recedes, oysters are there for the plucking and shucking – make sure you have a valid shellfish license. If you're feeling sunbaked, the park also creeps up the hillside to the south with a gentle hiking trail through a mossy forest and along a salmon-bearing creek.

12190 Highway 106, Union, Mason County; 360-275-2222.

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HEADLINE	05/18 WA outpaces nation in job growth
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/lifted-by-boeing-hiring-blitz-wa-outpaces-nation-in-hiring/
GIST	<p>Washington's job market is rebounding faster than it is across much of America, and is barely a thousand jobs short of its all-time high, according the latest state jobs report.</p> <p>One surprising case in point: Boeing, which spent much of the pandemic on life support, now seems to be on a hiring tear.</p>

The aerospace giant is hiring from 50 to 80 machinists and an additional 25 to 40 engineers, technical workers and interns every week, according to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, the two major unions representing Boeing workers. Most of the machinist hires are new, as Boeing has already called back most of its laid off workers, a machinists union spokesperson said.

But the state's jobs rebound won't feel like a win to everyone, especially those in some communities outside of the Seattle area or in sectors, [such as restaurants](#), that aren't enjoying quite the same recovery.

While April's overall jobs news is good, the "rebound has been uneven," said Jacob Vigdor, an economist with the University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy who studies state and local job markets.

Despite the broader job market's near-record performance, those who still haven't found work may not be "feeling like their standard of living is anywhere near an all-time high," Vigdor added.

Washington employers added 12,300 jobs in April, up from 9,000 in March, the Employment Security Department reported Wednesday. That means Washington accounted for 2.9% of the nation's job growth, despite having just 2.3% of the nation's population, Vigdor said.

It also puts state employment back to within 1,300 jobs of the roughly 3.5 million jobs it had in February 2020, just before the first big COVID-19-related layoffs.

Impressively, those improvements come despite wholesale cost increases, supply chain problems and especially worker shortages, which makes it extra hard to fill positions for employers who are trying to take advantage of the reviving economy.

"The current pace of job growth is surprising given how tight the labor market is," said Paul Turek, the ESD's state economist, in a statement Wednesday.

Some of April's top performers were also the most familiar. Many professional service firms and IT companies, which avoided slowdowns by shifting operations to remote work, kept up hiring during the pandemic and haven't really let up.

Information technology firms, for example, accounted for around a fifth of April's new jobs statewide. Since February 2020, employment in that industry is up by 17,400 jobs, or 11.6%.

Less expected, perhaps, is the hiring bump in manufacturing, which was hit hard early in the pandemic and was initially slow to recover.

Boeing was ranked second, behind only Amazon, among the state's 25 top employers by number of job openings posted online from January through April, according to ESD data. A year ago, Boeing didn't even make the list.

Boeing has offered few details about current hiring but has said it has about 5,000 open positions in the Puget Sound region.

"The Boeing numbers definitely pull up the entire manufacturing sector," said Vigdor. As a result, Washington state accounted for 3.3% of the nation's total growth in manufacturing jobs, even though it has just 2.3% of the total U.S. population, Vigdor said.

Still, many sectors haven't fully turned the corner on the pandemic recession.

Restaurants and hotels added 1,000 jobs, thanks in part to a seasonal hiring push. But the industry is still down by 24,100 jobs, or nearly 7%, of their pre-COVID numbers.

The unevenness of the recovery is also playing out geographically.

The Seattle area alone accounted for more than two-thirds of the state's job growth in April, and also added jobs nearly 40% faster than did the state as a whole, in part as hiring lagged in many areas outside the Seattle area.

In King County, unemployment was just 2.5% in March, the most recent month for which the state breaks out individual county data. That was just a fraction of the unemployment rates in places such as Grays Harbor County (7.6%) or Clallam County (6.4%).

In April, unemployment in the Seattle-area fell to 2.9%, compared to 4.1% for the state as a whole. That's almost double the gap of a year ago.

Anneliese Vance-Sherman, an ESD regional economist who covers Seattle, notes that the urban-rural employment gap predates the pandemic, and that the recovery is merely highlighting long-standing regional economic differences.

As the pandemic wanes, "we're really returning to those patterns ... where the unemployment rates are much higher in the rural areas from the urban areas," Vance-Sherman says.

One glaring exception: While the Seattle area's restaurants and hotels are still down by around 13% from their pre-COVID employment, the industry outside of the Seattle area is only down by around a half a percent.

Another: It's not just rural counties that are lagging. Pierce County's unemployment rate in March was 5.7%, or more than twice King County's.

And a caveat: Even with recent hiring, Boeing and other aerospace manufacturers are still missing nearly 21,000, or about 23%, of the jobs they had before COVID.

Given the uncertainty state of the global economy, Vigdor said, the industry remains highly vulnerable.

"Manufacturing is a fickle sector," Vigdor said. "Particularly with supply chain worries and geopolitical instability potentially impacting international trade, boom can turn to bust in the blink of an eye."

"We can't be sure that these added jobs are here to stay," he added.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Detainees hunger strike Tacoma ICE facility
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/detainees-at-northwest-immigration-detention-center-on-hunger-strike-over-covid-concerns/
GIST	<p>Nine people detained at the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma have joined in a hunger strike to protest what they say are unclean conditions in the detention center amid worries about COVID spread, according to an advocacy organization that's been in touch with the protesters.</p> <p>The strike began Friday, according to the group La Resistencia, at the fenced facility that is among the largest immigration detention centers in the U.S. The center has capacity for about 1,500 people held as they go through immigration-status proceedings.</p> <p>The detention center is operated by the for-profit GEO Group in partnership with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).</p> <p>The hunger strikers have asked for better cleaning of the facility and units, more nutritious food, better access to medical services and jobs that pay a minimum wage.</p>

“Their demands show how bad the environment is,” said Maru Mora Villalpando of La Resistencia, a Washington organization led by undocumented people that advocates for the closing of the Northwest detention center. “They can’t sleep, they aren’t getting medical care, and combined with that, they are in the place 24-7. It’s filthy.”

In a statement, GEO said the company has taken steps to mitigate COVID risks through cleaning, social distancing and testing. In total, 396 COVID cases have been reported at the detention center among detainees throughout the pandemic, according to an ICE data dashboard that provides case numbers for its facilities.

GEO said its centers, including the Northwest detention center, have continual access to physicians, dentists and mental-health professionals.

“Ensuring the health and safety of all those entrusted to our care and our employees has always been our No. 1 priority,” Christopher V. Ferreira, manager of corporate relations, said in an email.

Mora Villalpando said protesters reported being threatened by officers, though ICE disputes this, saying in a statement it “fully respects the rights of all people to voice their opinion without interference.”

Per ICE’s detention standards, any detainee who refuses food for 72 hours may be referred for medical evaluation, and may be isolated “when medical advisable” for monitoring. One protester, Mora Villalpando said, hasn’t had contact with the outside group since he was taken into the medical unit for treatment. He had broken a molar while eating before the hunger strike began and has a toe infection, she said.

There have been several hunger strikes from immigrants detained at the center in recent years.

In 2017, as many as [750 people refused meals for multiple days](#). A 2020 watchdog report by the [University of Washington’s Center for Human Rights](#) found the facility held [people in solitary confinement](#) on average more than any other ICE facility, and contended that it held people on hunger strikes in solitary confinement. A GEO group spokesperson said at the time that it strongly rejected the allegations.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Mount St Helens’ eruption 42nd anniversary
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/wednesday-marks-42nd-anniversary-of-mount-st-helens-cataclysmic-eruption/
GIST	<p><i>The Columbian, Vancouver, Wash.</i> - At 8:32 a.m. May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens’ top collapsed in the largest landslide in recorded history. It uncorked a blast that flattened 230 square miles. Fifty-seven people died in the eruption.</p> <p>It erupted more recently, if less dramatically, beginning in September 2004. That eruption didn’t end until January 2008, by which time the volcano had ejected 124 million cubic yards of lava, forming a new dome inside the crater.</p> <p>Mount St. Helens and Washington’s four other active volcanos — Mount Adams, Mount Rainier, Glacier Peak and Mount Baker — present a continuing threat. That’s why the state’s Emergency Management Division and the U.S. Geological Survey’s Vancouver-based Cascades Volcano Observatory are collaborating on virtual events for Volcano Awareness Month.</p> <p>At 6 p.m. Wednesday, geologist Alexa Van Eaton will speak about her studies of rock layers to piece together eruption history. The live virtual presentation is part of the Mount St. Helens Institute’s Views and Brews evening lecture series. Tickets are \$10. Sign up at mshinstitute.org/learn/volcano-views-brews.html to get the link.</p>

	<p>At 12:30 p.m. May 25, scientists and preparedness experts will host a webinar about the Cascades Volcano Observatory's 40th anniversary, how volcano monitoring has changed since the 1980 eruption, the status of Washington's Cascades volcanoes and general preparedness. USGS will also present its latest mudflow simulations for a Mount Rainier eruption. Get the link for the virtual event at mil.wa.gov, or watch it afterward on the state Emergency Management Division's YouTube channel.</p> <p>In addition, the Cascades Volcano Observatory recently digitized film reels from its archives that document volcanic activity at Mount St. Helens from March 1980 through August 1982. You can watch the videos at st.news/mountsthelensvideos.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Vax mandate state workers remains in place
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/inslee-mask-mandate-washington-state-covid-19/281-45fabe3f-db79-4765-8e53-d59f8ac66dbf
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Despite a rise in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said he is not re-implementing any mask mandates in the state.</p> <p>“That’s not under consideration right now,” said Inslee, D-Washington.</p> <p>Inslee said the vaccine mandate for state employees will remain in place.</p> <p>“It’s the nature of the disease. We do not want our state employees to go to the hospital, or dying,” said Inslee.</p> <p>He said an announcement could be made soon to exempt some state contractors from the requirement.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 King Co. Covid cases rising; soon level off?
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/covid-19-cases-rising-king-county-health-officer-hopes-theyll-soon-level-off/SVDWHWUJ6VERXPXP7IPHYGLM/
GIST	<p>As the most transmissible version of omicron spreads, so does word of COVID-19 infections.</p> <p>“On social media I see friends post, ‘Oh no, it just happened, I got the COVID,’ and they show their little at-home tests,” said Ramona Beeson of Burien.</p> <p>Public health officials said COVID cases in King County are up 8% in the last week and hospitalizations are up 37%.</p> <p>“What we’re seeing is just a whole lot of cases in the community,” said Dr. Jeff Duchin, King County’s health officer. “We know even if you’re infected in that first omicron wave, you’re still susceptible to infection by these new variants.”</p> <p>Duchin is hoping new cases will level off.</p> <p>“I can tell you the rate of rise of cases is slowing a little bit, it’s possible that we’re going to see a little crest. That doesn’t mean we can’t jump up again in a couple of weeks,” Duchin told KIRO 7.</p> <p>Most of Washington is in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s low-risk category, but King, Snohomish and Jefferson counties are listed as medium-risk.</p> <p>Clallam County is high-risk.</p> <p>Duchin said King County could move up to high risk if COVID patients start needing more hospital beds.</p>

	<p>“I don’t think we’re going to imminently trigger into the CDC high category. It could happen over the next couple of weeks, but it’s not going to happen this week,” Duchin said.</p> <p>A move to high-risk would not automatically mean a new indoor mask mandate.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Gov. Jay Inslee responded to a question about reinstating mask rules, saying, “We don’t have any immediate consideration of additional measures like that.”</p> <p>In fact, the governor hinted about loosening the vaccine mandate for state contractors.</p> <p>“We may make changes in the near future for some contractors, frankly, and we’re looking at that issue right now,” Inslee said.</p> <p>Health officials continue to recommend wearing a high-quality mask in crowded indoor places.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 WA homeless plan: focus on right of ways
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/gov-inslee-plan-to-ease-homelessness-aims-to-get-campers-off-of-state-highways
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Just a long the entrance ramp to Interstate 5 in South Lake Union, tents and debris are scattered in one area.</p> <p>“It’s said. It’s profoundly sad,” said Vaughn who lives in Seattle.</p> <p>There’s another encampment underneath a portion of I-5 northbound, and several people KOMO News spoke to Thursday said they are starting to notice more near state highways.</p> <p>“I’ve lived in Seattle for eight years now. It’s gotten so much worse now that I live here,” said Vaughn.</p> <p>At a news conference, Gov. Jay Inslee unveiled details of his plan to fight the homelessness crisis. He says a focus will be on state right of ways.</p> <p>“I believe this is both a moral obligation to get people out of these unsafe conditions and into the kind of rapid supportive housing that is both good for them and will remove this blight along the right of ways in the state of Washington,” Inslee said. “I’m please that legislator joined me in appropriating \$50 million this year that is dedicated this transition for folks that today are living on our state’s right of ways,” said Inslee.</p> <p>Teams from the Washington State Department of Transportation and Washington State Patrol will coordinate with local governments and non-profits.</p> <p>“Teams are going to be doing outreach to encampment residents and maybe be able to offer services and transitioning people as early as Mid-June,” said Inslee.</p> <p>People say they support the state’s plan but still wonder will it solve the problem in the long run.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Spy agencies open secret: lack of diversity
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/death-of-george-floyd-racial-injustice-national-security-intelligence-agencies-7149db22d9da96efba8396ba89cc977e
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The peril National Security Agency staff wanted to discuss with their director didn’t involve terrorists or enemy nations. It was something closer to home: the racism and cultural misunderstandings inside America’s largest intelligence service.</p>

The NSA and other intelligence agencies held calls for their staff shortly after [the death of George Floyd](#). As Gen. Paul Nakasone listened, one person described how they would try to speak up in meetings only to have the rest of the group keep talking over them. Another person, a Black man, spoke about how he had been counseled that his voice was too loud and intimidated co-workers. A third described how a co-worker addressed them with a racist slur.

The national reckoning over racial inequality [sparked by Floyd's murder two years ago](#) has gone on behind closed doors inside America's intelligence agencies. Publicly available data, published studies of its diversity programs, and interviews with retired officers indicate spy agencies have not lived up to years of commitments made by their top leaders, who often say diversity is a national security imperative.

People of color remain underrepresented across the intelligence community and are less likely to be promoted. Retired officers who spoke to The Associated Press described examples of explicit and implicit bias. People who had served on promotion boards noted non-native English speakers applying for new jobs would sometimes be criticized for being hard to understand — what one person called the “accent card.” Some say they believe minorities are funneled into working on countries or regions based on their ethnicity.

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, the first woman to serve in her role, has appointed diversity officials who say they need to collect better data to study longstanding questions, from whether the process for obtaining a security clearance disadvantages people of color to the reasons for disparities in advancement. Agencies are also implementing reforms they say will promote diversity.

“It’s going to be incremental,” said Stephanie La Rue, who was appointed this year to lead the intelligence community’s efforts on diversity, equity and inclusion. “We’re not going to see immediate change overnight. It’s going to take us a while to get to where we need to go.”

The NSA call following Floyd’s death was described by a participant who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private discussion. The person credited Nakasone for listening to employees and making public and private commitments to diversity. But the person and other former officials said they sometimes felt that their identities as people of color were discounted or not fully appreciated by their employers.

The NSA declined to comment on the call. It said in a statement that agency officials “regularly examine the outcomes of our personnel systems to assess their fairness.”

“Beyond the mission imperative, NSA cultivates diversity and promotes inclusion because we care about our people and know it is the right way to proceed,” the statement said.

A former NSA contractor alleged this year that racist and misogynistic comments often circulate on classified chatrooms intended for intelligence work. The contractor, Dan Gilmore, wrote in a blog post that he was fired for reporting his complaints to higher-ups. A spokeswoman for Haines, Nicole de Haay, declined to comment on Gilmore’s allegations but said employees who “engage in inappropriate conduct are subject to a variety of accountability mechanisms, including disciplinary action.”

The U.S. intelligence community has evolved over decades from being almost exclusively run by white men — following a stereotype that Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat, referred to in a hearing on diversity last year as “pale, male, Yale.” Intelligence agencies that once denied security clearances to people suspected of being gay now have active resource groups for people of different races and sexual orientation.

Testifying at the same hearing as Himes, CIA Director William Burns said, “Simply put, we can’t be effective and we’re not being true to our nation’s ideals if everyone looks like me, talks like me, and thinks like me.”

But annual charts published by the Office of Director of National Intelligence show a consistent trend: At rising levels of rank, minority representation goes down.

Latinos make up about 18% of the American population but just 7% of the roughly 100,000-person intelligence community and 3.5% of senior officers. Black officers comprise 12% of the community — the same as the U.S. population — but 6.5% at the most senior level. And while minorities comprise 27% of the total intelligence workforce, just 15% of senior executives are people of color.

A 2015 [report commissioned by the CIA](#) said the “underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority officers and officers with a disability at the senior ranks is not a recent problem and speaks to unresolved cultural, organizational, and unconscious bias issues.” Among the report’s findings: Progress made between 1984 and 2004 in promoting Black officers to senior roles had been lost in the following decade and recruitment efforts at historically Black colleges and universities “have not been effective.”

“Since its founding, the Agency has been unmistakably weak in promoting diverse role models to the executive level,” the report said.

Lenora Peters Gant, a former senior human capital officer for the CIA and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, [wrote](#) last year that the intelligence community constantly imposes barriers on minorities, women and people with disabilities. Gant, now an adviser at Howard University, called on agencies to release some of their classified data on hiring and retention.

“The bottom line is the decision making leadership levels are void of credible minority participation,” Gant said.

ODNI is starting an investigation of the slowest 10% of security clearance applications, reviewing delays in the cases for any possible examples of bias. It also intends to review whether polygraph examiners need additional race and ethnicity training.

The intelligence community currently doesn’t report delays in getting a security clearance — required for most agency jobs — based on race, ethnicity or gender. The months or years a clearance can take can push away applicants who can’t wait that long.

The office is implementing annual grant monitoring and assigning additional staff to work with universities in the intelligence community’s Centers for Academic Excellence program, intended to recruit college students from underrepresented groups. A 2019 audit said it was impossible to judge the program due to poor planning and a lack of clear goals.

The program also got a new logo after ODNI officials heard that [the previous “IC CAE” insignia](#) appeared to spell out “ICE,” an unintended reference to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Additional quiet changes are taking place across the agencies. Officials say the changes were in process before Floyd’s death, though conversations held with employees brought new urgency to diversity issues.

The NSA stopped requiring applicants for internal promotions to disclose the date they were last promoted to the boards considering their application. Officials familiar with the change say it was intended to benefit applicants who take longer to move up the agency ladder, often including working parents or people from underrepresented communities.

The CIA two years ago formally tied yearly bonuses for its senior executives to their performance on diversity goals, measured next to factors such as leadership and intelligence tradecraft. Last year’s class of new senior executives was the most diverse in the agency’s history.

Said CIA spokesperson Tammy Thorp: “We are proud of the Agency’s progress in ensuring our hiring, assignment, and promotion processes do not create barriers to advancement.”

	<p>La Rue, the chief diversity officer for the intelligence community, has hired several data analysts and plans for her office to issue annual report cards on diversity for each intelligence agency. She acknowledges advocates have to break through enduring skepticism inside and outside government that diversity goals undermine the intelligence mission or require lower standards.</p> <p>“The narrative that we have to sacrifice excellence for diversity, or that we are somehow compromising national security to achieve our diversity goals, is ridiculous,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 NKorea fights Covid with few tools
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/tea-infomercials-korea-fights-covid-tools-84825968
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- On a recent nighttime visit to a drugstore, a double-masked Kim Jong Un lamented the slow delivery of medicine. Separately, the North Korean leader's lieutenants have quarantined hundreds of thousands of suspected COVID-19 patients and urged people with mild symptoms to take willow leaf or honeysuckle tea.</p> <p>Despite what the North's propaganda is describing as an all-out effort, the fear is palpable among citizens, according to defectors in South Korea with contacts in the North, and some outside observers worry the outbreak may get much worse, with much of an impoverished, unvaccinated population left without enough hospital care and struggling to afford even simple medicine.</p> <p>“North Koreans know so many people around the world have died because of COVID-19, so they have fear that some of them could die, too,” said Kang Mi-jin, a North Korean defector, citing her phone calls with contacts in the northern North Korean city of Hyesan. She said people who can afford it are buying traditional medicine to deal with their anxieties.</p> <p>Since admitting what it called its first domestic COVID-19 outbreak one week ago, North Korea has been fighting to handle a soaring health crisis that has intensified public anxiety over a virus it previously claimed to have kept at bay.</p> <p>The country's pandemic response appears largely focused on isolating suspected patients. That may be all it can really do, as it lacks vaccines, antiviral pills, intensive care units and other medical assets that ensured millions of sick people in other countries survived.</p> <p>North Korean health authorities said Thursday that a fast-spreading fever has killed 63 people and sickened about 2 million others since late April, while about 740,000 remain quarantined. Earlier this week, North Korea said its total COVID-19 caseload stood at 168 despite rising fever cases. Many foreign experts doubt the figures and believe the scale of the outbreak is being underreported to prevent public unrest that could hurt Kim’s leadership.</p> <p>State media said a million public workers were mobilized to identify suspected patients. Kim Jong Un also ordered army medics deployed to support the delivery of medicines to pharmacies, just before he visited drugstores in Pyongyang at dawn Sunday.</p> <p>North Korea also uses state media outlets — newspapers, state TV and radio — to offer tips on how to deal with the virus to citizens, most of whom have no access to the internet and foreign news.</p> <p>“It is crucial that we find every person with fever symptoms so that they can be isolated and treated, to fundamentally block the spaces where the infectious disease could spread,” Ryu Yong Chol, an official at Pyongyang’s anti-virus headquarters, said on state TV Wednesday.</p> <p>State TV aired infomercials showing animated characters advising people to see doctors if they have breathing problems, spit up blood or faint. They also explain what medicines patients can take, including home remedies such as honey tea. The country’s main newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, advised people with</p>

mild symptoms to brew 4 to 5 grams of willow or honeysuckle leaves in hot water and drink that three times a day.

“Their guidelines don’t make a sense at all. It’s like the government is asking people to contact doctors only if they have breathing difficulties, which means just before they die,” said former North Korean agriculture official Cho Chung Hui, who fled to South Korea in 2011. “My heart aches when I think about my brother and sister in North Korea and their suffering.”

Kang, who runs a company analyzing the North Korean economy, said her contacts in Hyesan told her that North Korean residents are being asked to thoroughly read Rodong Sinmun's reports on how the country is working to stem the outbreak.

Since May 12, North Korea has banned travel between regions, but it hasn’t attempted to impose more severe lockdowns in imitation of China. North Korea's economy is fragile due to pandemic border closures and decades of mismanagement, so the country has encouraged farming, construction and other industrial activities be accelerated. Kang said people in Hyesan still go to work.

The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed worry this week about the consequences of North Korea’s quarantine measures, saying isolation and traveling restrictions will have dire consequences for people already struggling to meet their basic needs, including getting enough food to eat.

“Children, lactating mothers, older people, the homeless and those living in more isolated rural and border areas are especially vulnerable,” the office said in a statement.

Defectors in South Korea say they worry about their loved ones in North Korea. They also suspect COVID-19 had already spread to North Korea even before its formal admission of the outbreak.

“My father and sibling are still in North Korea and I’m worrying about them a lot because they weren’t inoculated and there aren’t many medicines there,” said Kang Na-ra, who fled to South Korea in late 2014. She said a sibling told her during recent phone calls that their grandmother died of pneumonia, which she believes was caused by COVID-19, last September.

Defector Choi Song-juk said that when her farmer sister in North Korea last called her in February, she said that her daughter and many neighbors had been sick with coronavirus-like symptoms such as a high fever, coughing and sore throat. Choi said her sister pays brokers to arrange phone calls, but she hasn’t called recently, even though it’s around the time of year when she runs short of food and needs money transfers via a network of brokers. Choi said the disconnection is likely related to anti-virus restrictions on movements.

“I feel so sad. I must connect with her again because she must be without food and picking wild greens,” said Choi, who left North Korea in 2015.

In recent years, Kim Jong Un has built some modern hospitals and improved medical systems, but critics say it's mostly for the country’s ruling elite and that the free socialist medical service is in shambles. Recent defectors say there are lots of domestically produced drugs at markets now but they have quality issues so people prefer South Korean, Chinese and Russian medicines. But foreign medications are typically expensive, so poor people, who are a majority of the North’s population, cannot afford them.

“If you are sick in North Korea, we often say you will die,” Choi said.

Despite the outbreak, North Korea hasn’t publicly responded to South Korean and U.S. offers of medical aid. World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Tuesday that the world body “is deeply concerned at the risk of further spread” in North Korea and the lack of information about the outbreak.

	<p>Choi Jung Hun, a former North Korean doctor who resettled in South Korea, suspects North Korea is using its pandemic response as a tool to promote Kim's image as a leader who cares about the public and to solidify internal unity. He says the country's understated fatalities could also be exploited as a propaganda tool.</p> <p>"One day, they'll say they've contained COVID-19. By comparing its death toll with that of the U.S. and South Korea, they'll say they've done a really good job and their anti-epidemic system is the world's best," said Choi, now a researcher at a Korea University-affiliated institute in South Korea.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 German vax mandate for health workers
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/germanys-top-court-oks-vaccine-mandate-health-workers-84827274
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Germany's top court said Thursday it has approved rules requiring health workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>The Federal Constitutional Court announced that it had rejected complaints against the measure, arguing that the importance of protecting vulnerable people in hospitals and care homes outweighs any infringement of health workers' rights.</p> <p>The limited mandate came into effect in mid-March. The constitutional court had previously refused to issue an injunction blocking its implementation while it reached a final decision.</p> <p>Health Minister Karl Lauterbach welcomed Thursday's ruling, saying in a statement that "the state is obliged to protect vulnerable groups." He thanked health facilities that have implemented the mandate, arguing that they have helped prevent more deaths from the omicron variant of the coronavirus.</p> <p>Chancellor Olaf Scholz initially wanted to extend the vaccine mandate to all adults, but even a proposal to impose one on people aged 60 and above was rejected by lawmakers.</p> <p>Almost 76% of the population in Germany has received two shots against the coronavirus so far, and nearly 60% has also received a booster shot. Demand for vaccination is very low at present, but the government on Wednesday approved spending more money on new vaccines that will allow the country to deal with a series of possible variants this fall.</p> <p>Lauterbach will host a meeting of his counterparts from the Group of Seven leading democracies in Berlin on Thursday and Friday, despite having had contact with U.S. Health Secretary Xavier Becerra a day before Becerra tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>A spokesman for Lauterbach said all safety precautions had been taken during the encounter Tuesday, and that Becerra would join by video from a Berlin hotel where he is currently in quarantine.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 'Another tough hurricane season' this year
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/biden-warns-tough-hurricane-season-year-84814228
GIST	<p>JOINT BASE ANDREWS, Md. -- President Joe Biden warned Wednesday that the country will likely see "another tough hurricane season" this year, and he pledged that his administration was prepared to respond to the storms and help Americans recover from them.</p> <p>"We know hurricanes are coming our way. They grow more extreme every season," Biden said before a briefing from top federal officials, including Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge.</p> <p>Biden urged Americans to "pay attention to hurricane warnings and follow the guidance of your local authorities."</p>

	<p>Before his remarks, Biden toured a hangar at Joint Base Andrews to view aircraft used to track and respond to hurricanes.</p> <p>One of the planes is used to fly through and above the storms, capturing data that allow meteorologists to produce more accurate forecasts.</p> <p>"It is really amazing what you all do to protect us," Biden said.</p> <p>Last year's worst storm was Hurricane Ida, which resulted in \$75 billion in damage and 55 deaths. Although the initial impact was in Louisiana, where the category four storm made landfall, it also caused heavy rain and flooding in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.</p> <p>Biden visited damaged neighborhoods in New Jersey and New York after Ida struck, warning that climate change has become "everybody's crisis" and represents a "code red" danger.</p> <p>"The threat is here. It is not getting any better," Biden said then. "The question is can it get worse. We can stop it from getting worse."</p> <p>However, even though Biden has increased the country's ambitions for slashing greenhouse gas emissions, he's been unable to reach a consensus with Democrats in the Senate over how to tackle climate change.</p> <p>This year, Colorado State, the University of Arizona and Accuweather are all forecasting a busier-than-average hurricane season.</p> <p>Kenneth Graham, director of the National Hurricane Center, frequently points out that the United States has had more category 4 and 5 hurricanes make landfall from 2017 to 2021 than from 1963 to 2016.</p> <p>This year, he recently told a Florida television station: "It looks like we are going to be busy again."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Poland: car drives into cyclists; kills 1
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/car-drives-14-cyclists-poland-dead-hurt-84817190
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland -- The driver of a car slammed into a group of 14 cyclists in a village south of Warsaw Wednesday, leaving one person dead and several others seriously injured, Polish media reported, citing rescue officials. The driver fled.</p> <p>Police were searching for the driver of the car, Łukasz Darmofalski, an official with firefighters, told the private broadcaster TVN24</p> <p>Officials did not immediately provide details or an explanation of the incident which occurred in Przytki, a village about 30 kilometers (20 miles) south of Warsaw.</p> <p>Ambulances and a rescue helicopter were sent to the scene and unsuccessful efforts were made to resuscitate the person who died. At least three people suffered serious injuries.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Interrogation, uncertainty Mariupol fighters
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-hopes-swap-steel-mill-fighters-russian-pows-84798867
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Nearly 1,000 last-ditch Ukrainian fighters who had held out inside Mariupol's pulverized steel plant have surrendered, Russia said Wednesday, as the battle that turned the city into a worldwide symbol of defiance and suffering drew toward a close.</p>

Meanwhile, the first captured Russian soldier to be put on trial by Ukraine on war-crimes charges pleaded guilty to killing a civilian and could get life in prison. Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO, abandoning generations of neutrality for fear that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not stop with Ukraine.

The Ukrainian fighters who emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks after being ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city face an uncertain fate. Some were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.

While Ukraine said it hopes to get the soldiers back in a prisoner swap, Russia threatened to put some of them on trial for war crimes.

Amnesty International said the Red Cross should be given immediate access to the fighters. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's deputy director for the region, cited lawless executions allegedly carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine and said the Azovstal defenders "must not meet the same fate."

It was unclear how many fighters remained inside the plant's labyrinth of tunnels and bunkers, where 2,000 were believed to be holed up at one point. A separatist leader in the region said no top commanders had emerged from the steelworks.

The plant was the only thing standing in the way of Russia declaring the full capture of Mariupol. Its fall would make Mariupol the biggest Ukrainian city to be taken by Moscow's forces, giving a boost to Putin in a war where many of his plans have gone awry.

Military analysts, though, said the city's capture at this point would hold more symbolic importance than anything else, since Mariupol is already effectively under Moscow's control and most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the drawn-out fighting have already left.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said 959 Ukrainian troops have abandoned the stronghold since they started coming out Monday.

Video showed the fighters carrying out their wounded on stretchers and undergoing pat-down searches before being taken away on buses escorted by military vehicles bearing the pro-Kremlin "Z" sign.

The U.S. has gathered intelligence that shows some Russian officials have become concerned that Kremlin forces in Mariupol are carrying out abuses, including beating and electrocuting city officials and robbing homes, according to a U.S. official familiar with the findings.

The Russian officials are concerned that the abuses will further inspire residents to resist the occupation and that the treatment runs counter to Russia's claims that its military has liberated Russian speakers, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment.

Resistance fighting was reported in the occupied southern city of Melitopol, where the regional military administration said Ukrainians killed several high-ranking Russian officers and a Russian armored train carrying troops and ammunition overturned, causing the munitions to detonate.

The administration said on Telegram that the Russian military does not maintain the tracks and overloads the trains, and "with help" from resistance fighters the train derailed. The reports could not be independently confirmed.

In a sign of normalcy returning to Kyiv, the U.S. Embassy reopened on Wednesday, one month after Russian forces abandoned their bid to seize the capital and three months after the outpost was closed. A dozen embassy employees watched solemnly as the American flag was raised.

“The Ukrainian people, with our security assistance, have defended their homeland in the face of Russia’s unconscionable invasion, and, as a result, the Stars and Stripes are flying over the Embassy once again,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. Other Western countries have been reopening their embassies in Kyiv as well.

In the war-crimes case in Kyiv, Russian Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old member of a tank unit, pleaded guilty to shooting an unarmed 62-year-old Ukrainian man in the head through a car window in the opening days of the war. Ukraine’s top prosecutor has said some 40 more war-crimes cases are being readied.

On the diplomatic front, Finland and Sweden could become members of NATO in a matter of months, though objections from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threaten to disrupt things. Turkey accuses the two countries of harboring Kurdish militants and others it considers a threat to its security.

Ibrahim Kalin, a foreign policy adviser and spokesman for Erdogan, said there will be “no progress” on the membership applications unless Turkey’s concerns are met. Each of NATO’s 30 countries has an effective veto over new members.

Mariupol’s defenders grimly clung to the steel mill for months and against the odds, preventing Russia from completing its occupation of the city and its port.

Its full capture would give Russia an unbroken land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014. It also would allow Russia to focus fully on the larger battle for the Donbas, Ukraine’s industrial east.

For Ukraine, the order to the fighters to surrender could leave President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s government open to allegations it abandoned the troops he described as heroes.

“Zelenskyy may face unpleasant questions,” said Volodymyr Fesenko, who heads the independent Penta think tank in Kyiv. “There have been voices of discontent and accusations of betraying Ukrainian soldiers.”

A hoped-for prisoner swap could also fall through, he cautioned.

Russia’s main federal investigative body said it intends to interrogate the surrendering troops to “identify the nationalists” and determine whether they were involved in crimes against civilians.

Also, Russia’s top prosecutor asked the country’s Supreme Court to designate Ukraine’s Azov Regiment — among the troops that made up the Azovstal garrison — as a terrorist organization. The regiment has roots in the far right.

The Russian parliament was scheduled to consider a resolution to ban the exchange of any Azov Regiment fighters but didn’t take up the issue Wednesday.

Mariupol was a target of the Russians from the outset. The city — its prewar population of about 430,000 now reduced by about three-quarters — has largely been reduced to rubble by relentless bombardment, and Ukraine says over 20,000 civilians have been killed there.

During the siege, Russian forces launched lethal airstrikes on a maternity hospital and a theater where civilians had taken shelter. Close to 600 people may have been killed at the theater.

In other developments, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov said Russia has begun using a prototype new laser weapon in Ukraine that is capable of hitting a target 5 kilometers (3 miles) away, state news agency Tass quoted him as saying on national television. He said it was tested Tuesday against a drone and incinerated it within five seconds.

	<p>Borisov said a new generation of laser weapons will eventually allow Russia to conserve its expensive long-range missiles.</p> <p>Speaking late Wednesday in his nightly video address, Zelenskyy likened the Russian boast to Nazi Germany's claims of Wunderwaffe, or wonder weapons, as the tide began to turn against it during World War II.</p> <p>A senior U.S. defense official said Wednesday that the U.S. has seen nothing to corroborate the claims. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. military assessment.</p> <p>Zelenskyy also said Ukraine is determined to retake Mariupol and Melitopol, as well as the southern cities of Kherson, Berdyansk and Enerhodar.</p> <p>"All of our cities and communities under occupation ... should know that Ukraine will return," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Russia: more of Mariupol fighters surrender
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/battle-mariupol-draws-close-surrender-84825221
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- The Russian military said Thursday that more Ukrainian fighters who were making a last stand in Mariupol have surrendered, bringing the total who have left their stronghold to 1,730, while the Red Cross said it had registered hundreds of them as prisoners of war.</p> <p>The International Committee of the Red Cross said that the registrations of Ukrainian prisoners of war, which included wounded fighters, began Tuesday under an agreement between Russia and Ukraine.</p> <p>The Geneva-based humanitarian agency, which has experience in dealing with prisoners of war and prisoner exchanges, said however that its team did not transport the fighters to "the places where they are held" — which was not specified.</p> <p>Ukrainian fighters who emerged from the ruined Azovstal steelworks after being ordered by their military to abandon the last stronghold of resistance in the now-flattened port city face an uncertain fate. Some were taken by the Russians to a former penal colony in territory controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.</p> <p>While Ukraine said it hopes to get the soldiers back in a prisoner swap, Russia threatened to put some of them on trial for war crimes.</p> <p>The Red Cross cited rules under the Geneva Conventions that should allow the organization to interview prisoners of war "without witnesses" and that visits with them should not be "unduly restricted."</p> <p>The organization did not specify how many prisoners of war were involved.</p> <p>It's also not clear how many fighters are left at the plant. Russia previously estimated that it had been battling some 2,000 troops in the waterside plant.</p> <p>Denis Pushilin, a senior Russia-backed separatist official in a region that includes Mariupol, said that those Ukrainian soldiers who needed medical assistance were hospitalized while others were put in a detention facility. He also claimed that Red Cross representatives were allowed to inspect the detention facility, but that could not be immediately verified.</p> <p>Amnesty International said earlier that the Red Cross should be given immediate access to the Mariupol fighters who surrendered. Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty's deputy director for the region, cited lawless executions allegedly carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine and said the Azovstal defenders "must not meet the same fate."</p>

Despite the setback in Mariupol, Ukraine's confidence has been growing after fighting the Russian offensive to an effective standstill and forcing Moscow to withdrawal from around Kyiv and narrow its military goals.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy who was involved in several rounds of talks with Russia, said Thursday in a tweet that at this stage "do not offer us a ceasefire — this is impossible without total Russian troops withdrawal."

"Until Russia is ready to fully liberate occupied territories, our negotiating team is weapons, sanctions and money," he tweeted.

Ukraine's military said in its morning briefing Thursday that Russian forces were still pressing their offensive on various sections of the front in the east, but were being successfully repelled.

Ukraine's military made no mention of Mariupol in its early morning briefing Thursday, saying only that Russian forces were still pressing their offensive on various sections of the front in the east, but were being successfully repelled.

In the eastern Donbas region, which has been the center of recent fighting as Russian forces on the offensive have clashed with staunch Ukrainian resistance, four civilians were killed in the town of Sievierodonetsk in a Russian bombardment, Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said. Three other civilians were wounded in the attack Wednesday, and the shelling continued into early Thursday, Haidai said.

On the Russian side of the border, the governor of Kursk province said a truck driver was killed and several other civilians wounded by shelling from Ukraine. Separatist authorities in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine said two civilians were killed and five wounded also in Ukrainian shelling over the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, in the first war-crimes trial held by Ukraine, a captured Russian soldier pleaded guilty on Wednesday of killing a civilian and faces a possible life in prison.

The plant was the only thing standing in the way of Russia declaring the full capture of Mariupol. Its fall would make Mariupol the biggest Ukrainian city to be taken by Moscow's forces, giving a boost to Putin in a war where many of his plans have gone awry.

Military analysts, though, said the city's capture at this point would hold more symbolic importance than anything else, since Mariupol is already effectively under Moscow's control and most of the Russian forces that were tied down by the drawn-out fighting have already left.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Ignored opioid abuse to fentanyl crisis
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/fentanyl-crisis-thrive-us-opioid-abuse/story?id=84781717
GIST	<p>As the fentanyl crisis continues to sweep across the United States, lawmakers are focused on trying to stop the flow of fentanyl into their communities, but many are saying that curbing the supply from dealers is only part of the larger problem. There’s demand.</p> <p>After five decades since the start of the war on drugs, critics say these efforts haven’t helped curb drug use.</p> <p>One in 14 Americans are suffering from some form of addiction to legal or illegal substances, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Some say the rise in fentanyl deaths has been exacerbated by ignoring the opioid crisis and the millions of people who are already suffering from addiction who continue to seek available opioids - in many cases, fentanyl.</p> <p>Ryan, who wished to be identified by first name only, said he has been living with an opioid addiction for decades. He said he just recently started using fentanyl.</p>

“I stopped for many years. I just relapsed three months ago and I hadn't used in 10 years,” said Ryan. “Fentanyl is in everything now.”

According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, fentanyl is 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Despite the risk, for many people like Ryan, despite how addictive it is, fentanyl quickly becomes their drug of choice because it is so potent.

Sam Rivera runs the nation's first overdose prevention clinic in Harlem, New York. The aim is to not stop people from using drugs, but to supervise them when they do by offering medical support and safety.

Rivera said that goal is harm reduction and preventing overdose deaths.

“We've had a number of overdoses today. It seems like a potential bad batch [of fentanyl],” said Rivera. “We're there when the overdose happens, and we're there immediately.”

Rivera added that not a single person has ever died at his clinic.

Studies show that similar programs in other countries have successfully reduced fatal overdoses and increased access to health services, according to a recent study published in the International Journal of Drug Policy.

Rivera said by giving people living with addiction a safe space to use drugs, it gets them into a supervised facility that can help them stay alive until they are ready to try to quit.

“Beautiful, hurting people are coming in with those drugs, to use them safely and stay alive,” said Rivera.

Other approaches include a clinic named Rock to Recovery In Nashville, Tennessee. They are using the power of music as therapy.

Phil Bogard, a former rock musician, is the program administrator at Rock to Recovery. He said he struggled with addiction and has been “clean and sober” for almost 14 years.

“We've got people playing keyboard parts, and I'm on a guitar. We're going to write a chorus together that we can all sing along to. An hour and a half passes by and we lived in the moment,” said Bogard, who adds that music fosters a sense of belonging and community. “And hopefully we got some people to get on the other side of ‘I can't, I won't, I'm not able to.’”

Activists say there is no easy answer to stopping both the enduring opioid crisis and the growing fentanyl crisis, those who are struggling with an addiction and need more resources and help now.

“They're going to use,” said Rivera. “I have people in that room right now who want to stop, they're right there saying, ‘I want to stop.’ But at least now they're talking about it.”

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HEADLINE	05/18 Turkey blocks Finland, Sweden application
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/18/finland-sweden-nato-apply/
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Turkey blocked the start of Finland's and Sweden's accession talks to NATO on Wednesday shortly after the Nordic nations submitted their applications, a signal of what could be a bumpy process to expand the alliance and reshape Europe's post-Cold War security architecture.</p> <p>Turkey's resistance deprived Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the consensus he needed to move forward with the membership process. It also put a damper on a historic moment for two countries that held fast to military nonalignment until Russia's invasion of Ukraine upended their thinking about security.</p>

At a meeting of NATO ambassadors, Turkey said it still needed to work through some issues related to Finland and Sweden joining the alliance, according to two officials familiar with the discussion, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive closed-door talks.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has objected to Sweden's granting of asylum to members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and he has indicated that he will seek other concessions if he is to allow the expansion to go forward.

NATO diplomats still widely believe Turkey will eventually waive its objections and allow the expansion, which would double the alliance's land border with Russia. But a process that was already expected to take months could be slower and more complicated than other alliance members had hoped.

Russia's Foreign Ministry tweeted Wednesday that "Russia will have to take retaliatory measures," with "their essence, including military and technical aspects," to be determined after assessing the terms of Finland's and Sweden's membership in NATO.

Finland and Sweden are in some ways most vulnerable to Russian attack during the period before they actually join, since they are still not covered by NATO's mutual defense guarantees. European officials and diplomats said the two countries are prepared for hybrid or clandestine attacks. Several allies have also offered assurances that Finland and Sweden could expect protection in the interim period.

Stoltenberg called the applications submitted Wednesday a "historic step."

"I warmly welcome the requests by Finland and Sweden to join NATO," he said at a news conference in Brussels with ambassadors from both countries. "You are our closest partners, and your membership in NATO would increase our shared security."

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Finnish President Sauli Niinisto are scheduled Thursday to visit the White House, where President Biden is expected to show his support.

In a statement Wednesday, Biden said: "I warmly welcome and strongly support the historic applications from Finland and Sweden for membership in NATO and look forward to working with the U.S. Congress and our NATO Allies to quickly bring Finland and Sweden into the strongest defensive alliance in history."

The Nordic nations' formal request to join NATO came amid other war-related developments Wednesday. A Russian soldier in Ukrainian custody pleaded guilty before a Kyiv court during the first trial on war crimes charges in the conflict, according to Ukraine's public broadcaster. The soldier is accused of killing an unarmed 62-year-old civilian.

Russia's Defense Ministry said another group of Ukrainian fighters in the strategic port city of Mariupol had left the Azovstal steel plant over the past day as part of a negotiated surrender, a claim The Washington Post could not immediately verify. Ukraine wants fighters taken to Russian-held territory to be released in exchange for Russian prisoners in Ukraine, but some key Russian officials are signaling they won't support such an exchange.

And the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv reopened, three months after it closed in the days leading up to Russia's Feb. 24 invasion.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO would bring the alliance's full force to the far north and bolster its presence in the Baltic Sea region. It would gain two sophisticated militaries with deep experience operating near Russia's frontier. Sweden also holds the strategically important island of Gotland, just 200 miles from the Russian military in Kaliningrad,

Finland and Sweden didn't consider themselves neutral before now. Militarily, they have been close NATO partners. Politically, they are members of the European Union.

But thinking of themselves as nonaligned militarily has been an important part of their self-conception. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a majority of people in both countries said it was safer to be outside NATO. But the past months have seen a dramatic swing in public opinion.

"This is an extraordinary development given where we were in February," said Anna Wieslander, director for Northern Europe at the Atlantic Council think tank.

"Russia wanted to turn back time, to go back to the Cold War, to fragment and weaken the West," she continued. "Now, in May, we are here."

Erdogan left the door open on Wednesday to approving the expansion, but he made clear that he wanted his concerns to be addressed by NATO and by Sweden and Finland.

"We are one of the countries that give the most support to the activities of the alliance, but this does not mean that we will unquestioningly say 'yes' to every proposal brought before us," he told members of his political party in Ankara. "The expansion of NATO is meaningful for us, in proportion to the respect that is shown to our sensitivities."

He said Turkey had asked Sweden to extradite "30 terrorists" — a reference to members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which the United States and Turkey have designated a terrorist organization.

"They said, 'We won't give them.' You will not hand over terrorists to us, but you will ask us to get up and join NATO," he said. "NATO is a security formation, a security organization, so we cannot say 'yes' to depriving this security organization of security."

Turkey's objection generated some dismay Wednesday on Capitol Hill. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) was sharply critical, saying the move added to broader concerns about Turkey's reliability as a U.S. ally following its purchase of Russian anti-aircraft systems and its refusal to join some broader Western sanctions after the Ukraine invasion.

Menendez noted that the maneuver was coming as Turkey is seeking to purchase dozens of new F-16 fighter jets, a sale that would require Biden administration and congressional approval. "I hope the administration is noticing it as they're considering F-16s," he said. "You should be telling Erdogan you've got to act in a different way if you want consideration for anything."

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), a co-chair of the Senate's NATO observer group, said, "I think it ultimately gets resolved." He noted that while the United States has "any number of levers" to compel Turkey's cooperation, "I don't want to escalate it to that point."

Biden was asked by White House reporters if he thought he could persuade Erdogan to drop his objections. "I'm not going to Turkey," he said. "But I think we're going to be okay."

Other members of the alliance expressed support for the bid Wednesday. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called it a "historic day for our alliance and the world."

"Not long ago nobody would have predicted this step, but Putin's appalling ambitions have transformed the geopolitical contours of our continent," he wrote on Twitter.

Putin has cited the threat of NATO expansion among the rationales for his unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Though on Monday he said that Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO did not represent an imminent danger to Russia, he warned that a military buildup in either country could change that assessment.

“Russia has no problems with Finland and Sweden, and in this sense, expansion at the expense of these countries does not create an immediate threat for us,” he said in televised remarks Monday. “But the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory will certainly provoke our response.”

“What it will be, we will look at based on the threats that will be created for us,” he continued. “We will respond accordingly.”

In a weekend telephone call, Putin told Finland’s Niinisto that the decision to join NATO was “wrong” and could have “a negative effect” on Russian-Finnish ties, but he did not make specific threats, according to accounts of the call.

NATO and European officials have for the most part downplayed the risk of significant Russian aggression.

The country’s military remains tied up in heavy fighting in Ukraine and has lost soldiers and equipment. Russia also withdrew troops from the border with Finland to fight in Ukraine, leaving Moscow with a reduced capacity to target the border militarily.

Given widespread support for the Nordic countries’ NATO accession, it will be difficult for Russia to influence their populations.

“There is no place to intervene, there is no ground to make people change their minds,” said Henri Vanhanen, a foreign policy expert and adviser to the center-right National Coalition Party in Finland. “This is the democratic resilience we have against Russia.”

“It is out of Russia’s reach right now to try to stop Finland and Sweden from joining NATO,” he said. “It has to come to terms with it.”

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HEADLINE	05/18 DHS suspends Disinformation Board
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/technology/disinformation-governance-board.html
GIST	<p>The Department of Homeland Security announced on Wednesday that it was suspending the work of an internal advisory board intended to combat disinformation after what the department described as a deliberate disinformation campaign.</p> <p>The creation of the panel, called the Disinformation Governance Board, set off a firestorm of criticism when it was announced last month. While the criticism came from across the political spectrum, including civil liberty groups, the fiercest denunciations came from the right. Republican leaders and commentators talked about it as an Orwellian Ministry of Truth that would police people’s speech.</p> <p>That was never the board’s mandate, a department spokesman said in a written statement. Instead, it was meant to coordinate the department’s various agencies in the fight against malicious disinformation by foreign adversaries, drug or human traffickers or other international crime groups.</p> <p>Only weeks after its inception, however, its fate is now in doubt. Nina Jankowicz, an authority on disinformation who was chosen in the spring to lead the board, submitted her resignation on Wednesday after facing vitriolic and highly personal harassment and abuse online.</p> <p>“False attacks have become a significant distraction from the department’s vitally important work to combat disinformation that threatens the safety and security of the American people,” the department’s statement said.</p> <p>The department’s secretary, Alejandro N. Mayorkas, has asked a bipartisan pair of former officials to review the issue of fighting disinformation: Michael Chertoff, who served as the department’s secretary under President George W. Bush, and Jamie S. Gorelick, deputy attorney general under President Bill Clinton.</p>

Mr. Mayorkas asked them to prepare recommendations within 75 days and said the board would not convene during that period. “Its work will be paused,” the statement said, confirming the suspension, which was [reported earlier](#) in The Washington Post.

Ms. Jankowicz’s departure, coupled with the board’s troubled rollout, makes it unlikely that it will resume operating in anything like its current form.

“We’ve killed the Ministry of Truth!” one of the board’s many Republican critics, Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida, wrote on Twitter.

Angelo Carusone, president of Media Matters for America, the left-leaning watchdog group, said that the opposition to the board consolidated quickly and fiercely, suggesting an organized and motivated effort. He noted that fighting disinformation has long been part of the government’s efforts, going back to campaigns by the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

The current political climate, however, has made the very subject a lightning rod that, he said, officials should have anticipated better. Instead, they seemed caught off guard by the response.

“I think it’s a disservice to all of us that we lose this function, especially in the wake of what we just saw in Buffalo, because that is a consequence of this information landscape,” Mr. Carusone said, referring to the [racist mass shooting](#) there. “It is a tinderbox.”

As the board’s director, Ms. Jankowicz, 33, bore the brunt of the attacks, a subject she knows well. Her most recent book, called “How to Be a Woman Online,” chronicles abuses she and other women face from trolls and other malign actors on the internet.

In a resignation letter submitted on Wednesday, she said that she joined the department this year to help address the impact of disinformation.

“It is deeply disappointing,” she wrote, “that mischaracterizations of the Board became a distraction from the Department’s vital work, and indeed, along with recent events globally and nationally, embodies why it is necessary.”

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HEADLINE	05/18 Defense act effort, ‘Operation Fly Formula’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/us/politics/biden-baby-formula-shortage.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden took urgent action on Wednesday to address the nationwide baby formula shortage, invoking the Defense Production Act to increase production and creating “Operation Fly Formula” to deploy Defense Department planes and speed formula shipments into the United States from overseas.</p> <p>The moves are Mr. Biden’s first major initiative to respond to a crisis that has sown fear and frustration among parents across the country and prompted Republicans and Democrats alike to demand action.</p> <p>His decision came as the formula shortage was threatening to become a political as well as a public health disaster for the administration, and on the eve of the first congressional hearing, with Dr. Robert M. Califf, the head of the Food and Drug Administration, to delve into how it happened and what is being done to respond.</p> <p>The White House announced its plan only hours before the House took action of its own, approving an emergency infusion of \$28 million for the Food and Drug Administration and a bill to loosen restrictions on what kind of formula can be purchased through the federal food aid program for women and babies.</p> <p>Under the plan that the White House put forward on Wednesday evening, government agencies could apply to use commercial aircraft owned by the Defense Department to pick up infant formula from</p>

overseas and fly it into the United States, getting it onto shelves more quickly. On Monday, the F.D.A. announced that it would streamline approvals so that more overseas companies could make such shipments.

The Defense Department will also use its contracts with commercial air-cargo lines to transport formula products from abroad, bypassing regular airfreight routes to speed up importation and distribution, as the administration did with medical material during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, administration officials said.

“I know parents all across the country are worried about finding enough infant formula to feed their babies — as a parent and as a grandparent, I know just how stressful that is,” Mr. Biden said in a video posted on Twitter. He had directed his administration “to do everything possible to ensure there’s enough safe baby formula and that it’s quickly reaching families that need it the most.”

Last week, Mr. Biden said the infant formula crisis was his highest priority and promised that parents would see more product on shelves within “weeks or less.”

Officials said invoking the Defense Production Act — a Korean War-era law designed to allow the president to require companies to take actions in the interest of the national defense — would allow the administration to compel suppliers of infant formula components to prioritize the needs of the formula manufacturers over others, helping to increase production and speed up the supply chain.

Several members of Congress, particularly Democrats facing difficult re-election races, have clamored in recent days for Mr. Biden to invoke the law to ease the formula shortage. It was not clear how quickly the impact would be felt.

A White House official, speaking on the condition of anonymity and without authorization to comment on the plan, said it could take time for companies to make use of the Defense Department’s offer to ship formula. But the official added that Mr. Biden was determined to do anything he could to shave even a few days off the manufacture and distribution of formula.

The White House announced the effort as it confronted aggressive questioning by Congress. In recent days, lawmakers have announced plans to haul administration and industry officials to Capitol Hill for testimony, demanded answers from Mr. Biden’s team on how the shortage was allowed to develop, and launched investigations into the crisis and Abbott Nutrition, the company that recalled several of its formula products after at least two infants died.

On Wednesday evening, the House overwhelmingly approved bipartisan legislation that would grant the federal government emergency authority to expand the types of formula that can be purchased with benefits from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, known as WIC. About half the formula sold in the United States is purchased with WIC benefits, and the legislation aims to ensure that those benefits can be used to buy whatever formula is available.

The measure was expected to move quickly through the Senate. But the proposal to issue emergency money for the F.D.A., which passed the House 231 to 192 on Wednesday night, faced a more difficult road amid opposition from Republicans, who said it was a blank check for an agency that had failed to prevent a major crisis.

In a notice sent to rank-and-file lawmakers, Republican leaders charged that Democrats had abandoned bipartisan talks and instead put forward legislation “with no plan to actually fix the problem, all while failing to hold the F.D.A. accountable.”

The WIC measure, by contrast, drew broad support, passing 414 to 9.

“I know what it means to not be able to stretch out milk for the entire month,” Representative Jahana Hayes, Democrat of Connecticut and a sponsor of the bill, said this week. Ms. Hayes, who said she had

used WIC benefits to purchase formula, added, “with everything going on right now, the last thing a family should have to worry about is feeding their children.”

Representative Michelle Steel, Republican of California, who partnered with Ms. Hayes and Representative Robert C. Scott, Democrat of Virginia, on the measure, said “families deserve to have this weight lifted off their shoulders.”

Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader, said he would move quickly to bring up the bill and pass it in that chamber. Supporters said they were confident that if necessary, it could clear the 60-vote threshold required to advance most legislation.

“I feel, based on initial reaction, that we should be successful with 60 votes,” said Senator Debbie Stabenow, Democrat of Michigan. “This is so basic. Everyone understands that we’re all on high alert here, and this is an incredible emergency.”

But most House Republicans opposed the emergency spending package, which they called overly broad. The three-page bill is intended to provide the agency with additional money to shore up its staff, which is responsible for monitoring the formula market and inspecting formula before it is shipped to stores.

Democrats defended the spending measure, pointing out that it would require that the agency send weekly reports to Congress outlining how the money is being spent.

“Anybody who says that that’s too much money to spend for the safety and well-being of our babies, I just don’t agree with,” Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, said on Tuesday. “Period.”

The action in the House came as lawmakers on both sides of the Capitol were demanding answers about the formula shortage and weighing more legislation aimed at responding. Dr. Califf, the head of the F.D.A., was scheduled to appear before the House Appropriations Committee on Thursday, and again before the House Energy and Commerce Committee next week. That hearing was also to feature testimony from senior officials at Abbott and other top manufacturers of infant formula.

Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and other Democrats put forth a bill that would broaden the F.D.A.’s authority to collect information from companies and require manufacturers of essential nutritional products to provide timely notifications of potential supply disruptions.

Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon and the chairman of the Finance Committee, announced on Wednesday that he had asked for information about tax and stock buyback practices at Abbott Laboratories, which oversees the nutrition branch, as well as how much money went toward the shuttered formula processing plant. Senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Cory Booker of New Jersey, both Democrats, wrote a similar letter demanding details about how the “prioritization of profit over safety and public health has created this crisis.”

“Abbott is a responsible and transparent taxpayer, paying all of its taxes owed in every country in which it operates around the world,” said Jonathon Hamilton, a spokesman for Abbott. He added that “stock buybacks are not impacting our ability to invest in or reopen our Sturgis manufacturing facility” in Michigan.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Stocks tumble; reignite fears of inflation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/business/stocks-market-retailers-inflation.html
GIST	<p>A short reprieve for investors ended abruptly on Wednesday as stocks had their worst day yet in a series of already ugly drops after shrinking profits by major retailers reignited Wall Street’s fear of high inflation.</p> <p>The S&P 500 fell 4 percent, its biggest drop since June 2020 and its fourth decline of more than 3 percent in less than a month, erasing gains in the index since late last week. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite dropped 4.7 percent.</p>

Retailers led the decline. Target plunged 24.9 percent, making it the worst performer in the S&P 500, after the company reported on Wednesday that high costs affected its profits in its latest quarter. It also lowered its forecast for the year.

The warning echoed a similar report from Walmart, which said on Tuesday that its profit fell 25 percent from a year ago in the quarter and also issued a grim forecast. It was down 6.8 percent on Wednesday after falling more than 11 percent the day before.

Other retailers were sharply lower. Costco fell 12.5 percent; Dollar Tree fell 14.4 percent; and Best Buy dropped 10.5 percent.

Retailers are being pinched by higher costs for fuel after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the sanctions imposed or proposed as a result, caused a jump in oil prices. On Wednesday, futures for oil contracts were slightly lower at about \$110 a barrel — but that price was still well above the approximately \$78 a barrel crude oil futures traded for at the end of last year. And AAA said gas prices in the United States pushed to a new high on Wednesday — \$4.57 on average for a gallon of regular — climbing well above its peak price in March. The average is now above \$4 in every state.

Both Target and Walmart said that their sales actually rose slightly as shoppers kept spending even with prices rising across the economy. On Tuesday, the government said consumer spending in the United States continued to climb in April. That eased investors' concerns about the health of the economy, but the upbeat sentiment didn't last long.

"Consumers are weathering the inflation hit," Fiona Cincotta, a senior financial markets analyst at Forex.com, wrote in a note. "Retailers, however, are not doing so well at navigating through 40-year high inflation."

Rising prices elsewhere may help TJX, which owns discount brands including T.J. Maxx, Marshalls and HomeGoods. It was one of just seven gainers in the S&P 500 on Wednesday, rising 7.1 percent, after it reported that profit rose a better-than-expected 10 percent in the three months through April.

Big swings have come to characterize trading on Wall Street in recent weeks as investors have struggled to face the uncertainty. The Federal Reserve is quickly raising interest rates to combat rapid inflation. And economists are worried that the economy is at risk of a recession because consumer activity could ebb as borrowing costs rise.

"Wall Street was anticipating that we were going to see a peak of inflation a month ago," said Edward Moya, a senior market analyst at Oanda. "Earnings season is telling us that these pricing pressures are not easing and that consumers should expect higher prices moving forward. That will force the Fed into a difficult decision where they might have to tighten more aggressively, and that could weigh on economic growth."

Jerome H. Powell, the chair of the Fed, said on Tuesday that the central bank would "have to consider moving more aggressively" if policymakers don't see clear indications that inflation is cooling.

The recent volatility has come with the S&P 500 hovering just above bear market territory, or a 20 percent drop from its most recent high. Passing that threshold generally reflects a lasting shift in tone among investors. By Wednesday afternoon, the index was 18.2 percent below its Jan. 3 high and was heading for its seventh consecutive weekly decline, its worst stretch since 2001.

Volatility has also gripped other markets. The rate on 10-year U.S. Treasury notes, a benchmark for borrowing costs across the economy, fell to 2.9 percent on Wednesday after climbing above 3 percent earlier this month, touching its highest level since 2018.

HEADLINE	05/18 Ukraine gruesome injuries, very few doctors
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-doctors.html
GIST	<p>KRAMATORSK, Ukraine — Days after Russian forces invaded, Yaroslav Bohak, a young cardiovascular surgeon, was at home with his family in the relative safety of western Ukraine, when a colleague placed a desperate call from the east, pleading with him to come help.</p> <p>Many doctors had fled the fighting, his friend said, and conditions at the hospital resembled a bygone era of warfare, with the surgeons who remained amputating limbs, instead of trying to repair them, to save grievously wounded soldiers.</p> <p>“He called me and said he could no longer cut off the arms of young people,” Dr. Bohak said, as he stood in an operating room of a hospital in Kramatorsk. “When I came here, I had surgery on the first day.”</p> <p>As Russian forces pummel eastern Ukraine with a mix of artillery, airstrikes and rocket attacks, frontline hospitals, many of them in poorer, rural areas, have become overwhelmed. They are severely short-staffed or have been abandoned completely, as doctors and nurses have fled the violence.</p> <p>All day long, the walls of the hospital shake with the thunder of battles raging near Kramatorsk, an industrial city in the Donbas region, where Russian forces have been waging a bloody offensive. A steady stream of ambulances arrives at the sandbag-reinforced emergency room, ferrying soldiers and civilians, many with life-threatening wounds.</p> <p>But the hospital is staffed by a skeleton crew. Only two of its 10 doctors remain, aided by six nurses working 24 hour shifts with only one day off for rest, said Tatyana Bakaeva, the senior nurse. (Hospital officials asked that its name not be published for security reasons.)</p> <p>“Only the most stoic remain,” Ms. Bakaeva said. “People are scared, what can you do?”</p> <p>It is a similar story throughout the Donbas: As the toll of wounded mounts, the need for more doctors and nurses becomes even more acute.</p> <p>In Avdiivka, right on the front lines, the lone remaining surgeon and the hospital medical director described spending months in the emergency room, never leaving except for quick dashes to the grocery store amid shelling. In Sloviansk, a city just to the north of Kramatorsk where plumes of smoke from battle can be seen on the horizon, only about a third of the hospital staff remains.</p> <p>The city of Bakhmut sits at a crossroads between Russian forces pushing from the east and the north. There, ambulances jam a small courtyard of the military hospital and the emergency room is almost always full.</p> <p>“Nobody ever prepares for war, and this region is not so densely populated to be able to deal with this many wounded,” said Svitlana Druzenko, who coordinates emergency evacuations of wounded soldiers and civilians from the battle zones. “The wounds are the same for civilians and soldiers because rockets do not choose where to fall.”</p> <p>Many of the wounded from the East are brought to Dnipro, a city of one million that has six big hospitals. But it is four hours’ drive from many frontline positions. And the hospitals there have also been depleted of nursing staff, said Dr. Pavlo Badiul, a surgeon at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Center in Dnipro.</p> <p>The center was full to capacity with war wounded and staff were working continuously without a break, he said.</p> <p>A member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, after training in California, Dr. Badiul put out an appeal through the society’s newsletter for equipment and medical supplies. “Although we get some targeted aid, much is still lost, diverted or taken to the wrong place,” he said.</p>

Volunteers have pitched in to pick up some of the slack. Ms. Druzenko works for a volunteer emergency medical organization known by its Ukrainian initials PDMSH. Its ambulances and personnel are ubiquitous at hospitals and at so-called yellow zone transfer points, locations on the edge of the battlefield where wounded soldiers are picked up by ambulances and rushed to the nearest hospital.

It is dangerous work. Last week, a yellow zone base that Ms. Druzenko's organization established north of Bakhmut was bombed by Russian forces.

"Not only drones, but aviation is working in that area," Ms. Druzenko said.

Most of the surgeons operating out of the hospital in Kramatorsk, including Dr. Bohak, are volunteers. Since he arrived, the hospital has had almost no amputations.

Dr. Bohak showed off cellphone videos of his surgeries last week. Digging into singed and shredded flesh, he extracted severed arteries and painstakingly stitched them back together, restoring circulation to the damaged limbs, allowing them and the soldiers they are attached to be saved.

"The nearest serious clinic is in Dnipro, which is 280 kilometers from here," he said. "It takes time to get there, and it may be too late to save the limb. That's why my arrival was very important."

Not all the limbs can be saved though. Eduard Antanovskyy, the deputy commander of the military unit at the hospital, said that recently a Russian soldier was brought in with a serious leg wound. While at the hospital, he said, the soldier was provided with security guards for protection.

"We had to take the leg because the tourniquet was on for too long," he said. "Even if we wanted to, we couldn't have saved his leg. We treated him humanely, not the way he deserved to be treated."

Despite months of warnings from the White House and others that Russia was planning to invade, many in Ukraine, including much of the political establishment and even some in the military, refused to believe it. When Russian rockets began to hit Ukrainian cities on Feb. 24, it set off a scramble. Hospitals in particular, were unprepared to handle the sudden surge in patients suffering from the vicious and difficult wounds that war inflicts.

In the first week, Dr. Maksim Kozhemyaka, a civilian trauma surgeon, volunteered to assist at the military hospital in Zaporizhzhia, one of the main hubs treating soldiers in eastern and southern Ukraine. Almost immediately, he said, the hospital was inundated with 30 to 40 patients a day and did not have sufficient supplies to handle gunshot wounds or other grievous injuries.

"We didn't believe that this could happen because we understood that in any case there would be huge losses on their side as well," Dr. Kozhemyaka said in an interview in the hospital's emergency room. "And of course, we thought that no rational leader of a country would do this."

For the hospital workers persisting through the grim routine, the losses can feel personal, and are sometimes deeply so.

One recent morning, ambulances raced up to the small hospital in Sloviansk carrying soldiers wounded in an airstrike just a few miles up the road. One of them carried the battered body of Ihor Ihoryuk, 33, the only child of the hospital's head nurse. Much of the hospital staff had known him since he was a boy.

The force of the explosion, outside a room in a seed factory where he and his comrades were sleeping, had ripped off his arm and his blood spilled onto the asphalt in front of the hospital as he was raced inside.

A few hours later, a nurse named Anna emerged from the hospital, her green eye liner running down her face. Ihor could not be saved, she said.

"He grew up in front of our eyes," she said, fighting back the tears.

	<p>She was holding a box containing Ihor's black army boots. "He won't be needing them anymore," she said.</p> <p>She took them to a spot a short distance from the hospital entrance and set them next to a pair of black tennis shoes that were soaked with blood. They belonged to a soldier who was killed the day before.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Long Covid hospitalizations' initial illness
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/18/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#long-covid-hospitalization
GIST	<p>More than three-quarters of Americans diagnosed with long Covid were not sick enough to be hospitalized for their initial infection, a new analysis of tens of thousands of private insurance claims reported on Wednesday.</p> <p>The researchers analyzed data from the first few months after doctors began using a special diagnostic code for the condition that was created last year. The results paint a sobering picture of long Covid's serious and ongoing impact on people's health and the American health care system.</p> <p>Long Covid, a complex constellation of lingering or new post-infection symptoms that can last for months or longer, has become one of the most daunting legacies of the pandemic. Estimates of how many people may ultimately be affected have ranged from 10 percent to 30 percent of infected adults; a recent report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office said that between 7.7 million and 23 million people in the United States could have developed long Covid. But much remains unclear about the prevalence, causes, treatment and consequences of the condition.</p> <p>The new study adds to a growing body of evidence that, while patients who have been hospitalized are at greater risk for long Covid, people with mild or moderate initial coronavirus infections — who make up the vast majority of coronavirus patients — can still experience debilitating post-Covid symptoms including breathing problems, extreme fatigue and cognitive and memory issues.</p> <p>"It's generating a pandemic of people who were not hospitalized, but who ended up with this increased disability," said Dr. Paddy Ssentongo, an assistant professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Penn State, who was not involved in the new study.</p> <p>The analysis, based on what the report calls the largest database of private health insurance claims in the United States, found 78,252 patients who were diagnosed with the new code from the International Classification of Diseases — diagnostic code U09.9 for "Post COVID-19 condition, unspecified" — between Oct. 1, 2021, and Jan. 31, 2022.</p> <p>Dr. Claire Steves, a clinical academic and physician at King's College London, who was not involved in the new research, said the overall number of people who received the diagnosis was "huge," given that the study covered only the first four months after the diagnostic code was introduced and did not include people covered by government health programs like Medicaid or Medicare (though it did include people in private Medicare Advantage plans). "That's probably a drop in the ocean compared to what the real number is," Dr. Steves said.</p> <p>The study, conducted by FAIR Health, a nonprofit organization that focuses on health care costs and insurance issues, found that 76 percent of the long Covid patients did not require hospitalization for their initial coronavirus infection.</p> <p>Another striking finding was that while two-thirds of the patients had pre-existing health conditions in their medical records, nearly a third did not, a much larger percentage than Dr. Ssentongo said he would have expected. "These are people who have been healthy and they're like, 'Guys, something is not right with me,'" he said.</p>

The researchers plan to continue to track the patients to see how long their symptoms last, but Robin Gelburd, the president of FAIR Health, said that the organization decided to publish data from the first four months now, “given the urgency” of the issue.

She said researchers were working to try to answer some of the questions that are not addressed in the report, including providing detail on some patients’ previous health conditions to try to identify whether certain medical problems put people at higher risk of long Covid.

The organization also plans to analyze how many patients in the study were vaccinated and when, Ms. Gelburd said. More than three-quarters of the patients in the study were infected in 2021, most of those in the last half of the year. On average, patients were still experiencing long Covid symptoms that qualified for the diagnosis four and a half months after their infection.

The findings suggest a potentially staggering impact of long Covid on people in the prime of their lives, and on society at large. Nearly 35 percent of the patients were between the ages of 36 to 50, while nearly one-third were ages 51 to 64, and 17 percent were ages 23 to 35. Children were also diagnosed with post-Covid conditions: Nearly 4 percent of the patients were 12 or younger, while nearly 7 percent were between ages 13 and 22.

Six percent of the patients were 65 and older, a proportion that most likely reflects the fact that patients covered by the regular Medicare program weren’t included in the study. They were much more likely than the younger groups with long Covid to have had pre-existing chronic medical conditions.

The insurance data analyzed did not include information about the race or ethnicity of patients, researchers said.

The analysis, which Ms. Gelburd said was evaluated by an independent academic reviewer but not formally peer-reviewed, also calculated a risk score for the patients, a way of estimating how likely people are to use health care resources. Comparing all the insurance claims the patients had up until 90 days before they contracted Covid with their claims 30 days or more after they were infected, the study found that average risk scores went up for patients in every age group.

Ms. Gelburd and other experts said the scores suggested that the repercussions of long Covid are not simply confined to increased medical spending. They signal “how many people are leaving their jobs, how many are being given disability status, how much absenteeism is there in school,” Ms. Gelburd said. “It’s like a pebble thrown into the lake, and these ripples circling that pebble are concentric circles of impact.”

Because the study captured only a privately insured population, Dr. Ssentongo said, it almost certainly understates the scope and burden of long Covid, especially since low-income communities have been disproportionately affected by the virus and often have less access to health care. “I think it may even be worse if we added in the Medicaid population and all these other people that would have been missed” in the study’s data, he said.

Sixty percent of the patients with the post-Covid diagnosis were female, the study reported, compared with 54 percent of Covid patients overall in the FAIR Health database. In the oldest and youngest age groups, however, there were roughly as many males as females.

“I think there is a female preponderance in terms of this condition,” Dr. Steves said, adding that the reasons could include differences in biological factors that make women more prone to autoimmune conditions.

The insurance claims showed that nearly one-quarter of the post-Covid patients had respiratory symptoms, nearly one-fifth had coughs and 17 percent had been diagnosed with malaise and fatigue, a far-reaching category that could include issues like brain fog and exhaustion that gets worse after physical or mental activity. Other common issues included abnormal heartbeats and sleep disorders.

Generalized anxiety disorder was more common for 23- to 35-year-olds than for other age groups, the study reported, while hypertension was more common in the oldest patients.

Last year, FAIR Health published a [study](#) tracking insurance records of nearly two million people who had contracted Covid, which found that one month or more after their infection, almost one-quarter of them — 23 percent — [sought medical treatment for new conditions](#).

The new study tried to determine how common certain symptoms were before the patients got infected compared with the period when those same patients were diagnosed with post-Covid conditions. It found that some typically uncommon health issues were much more likely to emerge during long Covid. For example, muscle problems occurred 11 times more often in the patients with long Covid, pulmonary embolisms occurred 2.6 times more often and certain types of brain-related disorders occurred two times more often, the study said.

Like previous studies, the report found that if patients did need hospitalization for their initial infection, they were at higher risk of long-term symptoms than patients who were not hospitalized. The report came to that conclusion because about 24 percent of the patients diagnosed with a post-Covid condition had been hospitalized — more of them male than female — while only about 8 percent of all coronavirus patients needed hospitalization.

Still, because the vast majority of people do not need to be hospitalized for their infection, medical experts said that this and other studies indicate that many people with mild or moderate initial illness will end up with lingering symptoms or new post-Covid health problems.

Ms. Gelburd and medical experts said that as doctors become more acquainted with the U09.9 code, they might use it in different circumstances than they did in the first four months. One [recent analysis](#) found that doctors' use of the code has been inconsistent so far.

Given the likely scale of long Covid, Dr. Ssentongo said he expects that in the future doctors will ask patients if they have ever been diagnosed with post-Covid conditions, just as doctors ask about other previous medical problems so they can treat patients appropriately.

"Post-Covid syndrome is going to become perhaps one of the most common pre-existing comorbidities going forward," he said.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Experts: vulnerable as ever to pandemics
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/18/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#global-pandemic-preparation
GIST	<p>Governments around the world are no better prepared today to address a new global disease threat than they were just before the coronavirus outbreak began in late 2019, a World Health Organization panel concluded in a report released on Wednesday.</p> <p>The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response has sought an overhaul of the world's approach to outbreaks, which it considers outdated and inadequate. The group, established in July 2020, made recommendations last year for improving political leadership, financing and surveillance systems. But it appears that little has changed since then.</p> <p>"One year on, and political focus to prepare for more waves is flagging," wrote the authors, led by Helen Clark, the former New Zealand prime minister; and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia. "Work has begun to prevent the next pandemic, but at the current pace, the transformative change required will take years to complete."</p>

The report was released ahead of the World Health Organization's annual policymaking forum, the World Health Assembly, which is starting next week in Geneva. It echoes a report released late last year that said the world remained "[dangerously unprepared](#)" for the next major disease outbreak.

The authors of the new report zeroed in on the uneven distribution of vaccines around the world as one of the major hurdles to overcome. The issue is highlighted by the unfolding coronavirus crisis in North Korea, one of two countries — the other is Eritrea — that have not yet begun vaccinating their residents. North Korea said the number of suspected coronavirus infections had [neared 1.5 million](#) on Tuesday.

W.H.O. officials in Geneva told reporters on Tuesday that uncontrolled transmission of the virus could allow new variants to arise, a point that was reiterated by the panel's new report.

"Variants may still emerge that our vaccines cannot manage," the panel wrote. "The more quickly we vaccinate now, the less likelihood there is of ever more variants emerging."

The panel is pushing to expand the development and supply of therapeutics and diagnostic tests.

It noted that all told, high-income countries had obtained enough Covid vaccine doses to vaccinate their entire populations twice over, through direct deals with vaccine manufacturers to buy existing supplies and future output. That left many low- and middle-income countries without adequate vaccine supplies.

Fewer than 13 percent of people in low-income countries are considered fully vaccinated against Covid-19, the report said.

Germany [announced](#) plans on Wednesday to spend another \$870 million to buy more vaccines to prepare for possible new variants this fall. About [80 percent](#) of Germans are vaccinated, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford.

Vaccine production is now at its limit, the panel said, adding that new manufacturing capacity for mRNA and other vaccines must urgently be built in Africa, Latin America and other low- and middle-income regions. "Boosting production takes time, so enabling it must begin now," the report said.

The panel applauded President Biden's second [Covid-19 summit](#), held virtually last week. But it said that "a 'charity' approach is not serving the interests of ending this pandemic or tackling future pandemic threats."

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HEADLINE	05/18 Federal officials warn increase virus cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/18/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#white-house-covid-briefing
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Federal health officials warned on Wednesday that a third of Americans live in areas where the threat of Covid-19 is now so high that they should consider wearing a mask in indoor public settings. They cited new data showing a substantial jump in both the spread of the coronavirus and hospitalizations over the past week.</p> <p>Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said that the seven-day average of hospital admissions from Covid rose 19 percent over the previous week. About 3,000 people a day were being admitted with Covid, she said, although death rates, a lagging indicator, remained low.</p> <p>More than 32 percent of Americans now live in counties with medium to high levels of virus transmission, compared with about 24 percent the previous week. Dr. Walensky said that local leaders and individuals in those regions should adopt — or at least consider — prevention strategies, such as masking in indoor public settings and more frequent testing.</p>

The warnings from Dr. Walensky and other federal health officials seemed somewhat at odds with President Biden's own stance. The attitude in the West Wing more closely mirrors that of most Americans, who have eagerly moved away from mask-wearing and other strategies to prevent infection.

Mr. Biden no longer wears a mask in most settings, and is once again participating in Washington's political and social scenes. The White House still takes precautions, regularly testing the president and those in close contact with him, and aides say Mr. Biden adheres to C.D.C. guidelines.

But he no longer treats the pandemic as his chief concern among many. Wednesday's Covid briefing at the White House was the first in six weeks. While he has spoken about the pandemic's enduring threat and toll, Mr. Biden has given far more speeches recently on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and on inflation.

At the same time, a string of people in the president's circle have been infected with the virus. On Wednesday, officials announced that Xavier Becerra, the health and human services secretary, had [tested positive, as did Ashley Biden, the president's daughter.](#)

Mr. Biden says the shift in his tone is the result of the country's success. Many people are vaccinated, a fair number are boosted, and those doses, plus new antiviral treatments, have been warding off severe disease, officials say. But the new approach is also a recognition of the political reality. Many Americans have decided to accept the risk of infection to resume their normal routines.

Andy Slavitt, a former senior adviser to the Biden White House on the pandemic, said the nation's attention had shifted. The president "is managing a war overseas, the economy, inflation, infant formula and as these things go, the pandemic is now seen by the public as one more thing," he said. "Of all the things going on, most people don't perceive this to be the problem that it probably is."

The president's stance could backfire if the virus's latest surge continues to build, evading the vaccines and making more people seriously ill. Should that happen, it could look like a repeat of last summer, when the president declared "independence" from the virus ahead of the July 4 holiday, only to see massive waves of illness and death once the Delta and Omicron variants hit.

Experts say that administration officials — including the president — should also be doing a better job of preparing the public for a reinvigorated virus in the fall and winter, when people spend more time indoors. If people become complacent now, they say, forgoing booster doses or failing to vaccinate their children, they could pay a price then.

"The attitude is, 'We've got this, we're over it.'" said Dr. Eric Topol, a professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research in San Diego. "People should be gearing up, they should be getting booster shots. But there is no awareness."

If the pandemic appears to be a lesser concern, that also makes it harder for the White House to make the case that it needs tens of billions in new funding from Congress to replenish its supply of tests, treatments and vaccines in time for the fall. The administration has said it wants to launch a booster campaign at that point, hopefully with vaccines retooled to work better against the latest version of the virus.

At the White House briefing, Dr. Ashish Jha, the new White House coordinator of the pandemic response, warned that if Congress failed to grant the administration's request for \$22 billion in new Covid funding, Americans would suffer come the fall.

He did not repeat an earlier administration claim that the nation could face 100 million infections next fall and winter. Instead, he said that projections from biostatisticians varied greatly, depending on estimates of how much of the population has developed immunity and other complex factors.

But he said that a scenario in which the nation had to face the virus without enough doses of vaccines and treatments would be "terrible," adding: "I think we would see a lot of unnecessary loss of life."

Dr. Jha said the current incidence of severe disease would be worse if not for Paxlovid, an oral treatment developed by Pfizer that helps prevent severe illness if taken soon after symptoms develop. Doctors are prescribing Paxlovid pills to about 20,000 patients a day, he said. That may help explain why the rates of hospitalization and intensive care patients are low relative to the jump in infections, he added.

Officials also warned at the briefing that far too many Americans are failing to take advantage of booster shots to bolster waning protection against infection, leaving themselves vulnerable to the coronavirus's ever more contagious incarnations. Dr. Walensky said 62 percent of those aged 50 to 64 have not received a booster in the past six months, nor have 57 percent of those 65 or older.

Despite the nation's weariness with mitigation measures, she said that in areas [with high levels of transmission](#), mostly in the Northeast, "we urge local leaders to encourage the use of prevention strategies like masking in public indoor settings and increasing access to testing and treatment for individuals."

In areas with medium levels of transmission, including counties in nearly every state, people should consider wearing a mask in indoor public settings, avoiding crowds and testing themselves more often, especially before gathering with others indoors, she said.

Whether local leaders will heed C.D.C. recommendations is another matter. New York City is now experiencing a high level of transmissions, but Eric Adams, the city's mayor, said on Wednesday that [he had no plans to bring back mask requirements](#).

"If every variant that comes, we move into shutdown thoughts, we move into panicking, we're not going to function as a city," Mr. Adams said at a news conference. He said the city was settling into a "new norm" instead, recognizing that the virus would keep on mutating.

In an implicit recognition that the pandemic is not over, the administration on Monday quietly let pass a deadline for lifting the public health emergency, which has allowed the government to take steps like offering Americans free coronavirus vaccines, tests and treatments; barring states from canceling people's Medicaid coverage; and expanding access to telehealth appointments. It has also allowed hospitals to get paid more for treating Medicare patients who have Covid.

As of Tuesday, the average of new, confirmed coronavirus cases in the United States surpassed 100,000 a day for the first time since Feb. 20, [according to a New York Times database](#). That figure is up 61 percent from two weeks ago. [Public health experts believe the true number is far higher](#), because many people are not reporting the results of at-home tests.

The big unanswered question, experts say, is whether the rise in cases that is already well underway will be followed by a commensurate rise in hospitalizations and deaths. While hospitalizations are rising, deaths have remained low. About 275 deaths have been recorded each day on a seven-day average, according to the C.D.C. director, but the number has actually dipped slightly in recent weeks.

"We could be entering a period where we have an increased number of cases but a substantially decreased severity of illness, so that we see fewer hospitalizations and many fewer deaths," said Michael T. Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. "But as absolutely uncomfortable and unsatisfactory as this is, we just don't know what this virus is going to throw at us in the next 90 days."

That poses a messaging challenge for the White House, he said: "What we need to do is not whipsaw from, 'We're over,' to 'Oh my God, how bad it could be.' "

Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, an oncologist, medical ethicist and University of Pennsylvania professor who led an effort to draft a new pandemic strategy called "The Next Normal," was more blunt in calling for the White House to improve its Covid communications strategy: "They need to step up their game."

HEADLINE	05/18 Water safety advisory ahead warm weather
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/water-safety-advised-weekend-warm-weather-expected/2BLDGJR3LNHXPIWNXFYWHCW5OA/
GIST	<p>This weekend, western Washington is expected to experience some warm temperatures, and those who are in the rescuing business stopped by KIRO 7 with a lifejacket and some reminders that will help save lives.</p> <p>While state law requires anyone using paddleboards, kayaks, rafts, and canoes to wear both a life jacket and a whistle, first responders said too many people don't.</p> <p>Those driving a newer boat less than 26 feet long will now have to wear a kill switch safety lanyard, which will stop a running boat if they fall off. The Coast Guard said it is actually common.</p> <p>Over the last two years, 48 people in Washington state have died in watercraft accidents. According to the state, 77% of those people were not wearing a life jacket.</p> <p>Officials said the idea that you can swim to safety is dead wrong, especially in our state's cold waters.</p> <p>"If the people who got in trouble on the water were wearing life jackets, they would be alive today," said Derek Van Dyke with Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission. "You can be an Olympic swimmer, you can be someone who doesn't swim at all, it's probably going to happen where you ingest water. Within the first two, three seconds, if you ingest water, go underwater, and then you drown."</p> <p>"We've taken high school and collegiate swimmers out into cold water on Puget Sound, and they can't swim 25 meters. You know they might be the 25-meter state champion, and they get on the cold water and their body just shuts down," said Sergeant Rich Barton with the King County Sheriff's Office marine rescue unit.</p> <p>KIRO 7 got a chance to check the temperatures in Lake Washington and Sammamish on Wednesday. Both were around 52 degrees, which rescuers said would give anyone less than an hour to survive hypothermia, even with a life jacket.</p> <p>Both men said the water in the rivers will not warm up, and cold water shock is something they expect to see as soon as the weather warms.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Council approves King Co. sheriff
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/king-county-council-unanimously-confirms-king-county-sheriff/UXBHNJWP65GWRNXEB4SPF4XKL4/
GIST	<p>By unanimous approval, the King County Council confirmed Patti Cole-Tindall as King County sheriff on Wednesday.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall, the acting interim sheriff, was nominated by Executive Dow Constantine in November 2021 and sworn in on Jan. 1.</p> <p>She is the first person of color to serve as sheriff in King County's history.</p> <p>Joining the King County Sheriff's Office in 2015, Cole-Tindall served as the chief of the Technical Services Division for almost five years before being appointed undersheriff, where she was responsible for day-to-day operations with the three division chiefs.</p> <p>Prior to that, Cole-Tindall concurrently served as the county's director of labor relations and the interim director of the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Rebound efforts for downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/downtown-seattle-welcomes-locals-back/281-20933cab-eec6-48cf-a63f-54154480d093
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — There certainly is a crowd surrounding the iconic "Pike Place Fish" stand. It's a business that has entertained visitors for almost 30 years.</p> <p>"It's hard to see Seattle take such a turn, but every day it's getting better and better and it's coming back," said Jason Scott, who is the co-owner of "Pike Place Fish."</p> <p>Pike Place Market is one of many downtown organizations coming together to host five block parties in three days. The goal is to welcome people back to downtown and encourage locals to meet. They have bands playing and food options as a way to liven up the area for people who work or live in the area.</p> <p>"I think what Seattle is doing well is we're all working together so there's a really big partnership among all the really big attractions in town," said Amy Wallsmith, who is the director of Marketing and Program Development at Pike Place.</p> <p>Construction is also a clear sign of growth. The newly rebranded Seattle Convention Center is adding another building to their campus. After four years, it should be finished in late fall.</p> <p>"So we're excited about that, booking business in 2023 going forward so we're ready to go," said Jeff Blosser, the president and CEO of the Seattle Convention Center.</p> <p>According to the Convention Center, they estimate this project will bring in \$260 million per year in visitor spending as well as \$19 million in annual tax revenue from delegate spending.</p> <p>"When we bring convention business into town everybody does well downtown," said Blosser.</p> <p>People are heading downtown, the foot traffic has recovered 75% this month compared to the same time in 2019.</p> <p>According to the Downtown Seattle Association's Economic Recovery Report, Downtown has seen Domestic Visitors at 89% this month. It pairs with the 85% recovery in hotel room demand. At Pike Place, which closed down for part of the pandemic, they're back to 68%.</p> <p>Despite the recovery, crime remains a reason some avoid the area. "It's a huge concern for us down in the market, we kind of take care of each other down here, but it's getting better," said Scott.</p> <p>Blosser said the increase in tourism from the convention center just brings more people downtown, which is a good thing. "There are issues that go away because people are around and I think it's really more about trying to make sure that we can do that," said Blosser.</p> <p>It's an effort involving many downtown organizations, businesses and groups.</p> <p>"Businesses downtown have to survive and all of the people coming back to work, it takes it all to bring it back," said Scott.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Tacoma clears notorious homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/tacoma-clears-notorious-homeless-camp-over-safety-concerns
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma city crews on Wednesday began clearing a notorious homeless encampment linked to a recent tripling of calls to the city's 911 center about shots fired or small blazes.</p> <p>Between January and March of this year, the encampment near People's Park in Tacoma generated 243 calls to 911. While for that same period in 2021, only 65 calls were made for help, according to city data.</p>

	<p>The number of calls in March alone jumped 359 percent year-to-year, the data shows.</p> <p>"We've repaired their cars. We've given them food," said Bernal Baca, who works with Mi Centro, which provides services for the Latino and Indigenous community. "We've been good neighbors for them and it's gotten to the point that it's gotten overwhelming for us."</p> <p>The group's building is located right next to where the clean up occurred.</p> <p>"Most of my staff don't want to come to work because they're afraid to get out of the car," Baca said. "They're harassed by them and i personally have been accosted."</p> <p>He approves of the city's work but others in the area said they do not.</p> <p>"These people, everything they have is gone when they come through and take their stuff and everything," said Andrea McCullough, who lives in the area. "There's people that go overboard and stuff like that, but we need resources."</p> <p>And other organizations who were at the site Wednesday were just trying to help how they could.</p> <p>We are "helping those people who are homeless get resources," said Harold Odom, who works with the Lived Experiences Coalition. "We don't believe in the sweeps. We don't believe anybody should be displaced."</p> <p>Tacoma city officials said there is shelter space currently available and they are working to add more.</p> <p>"We have shelter vacancies for those that want it," said Caleb Carbone, spokesman for the city. "We can't force people to go into shelter, nor do we want to. We want to be able to support every individual and where they're at. But we also have to keep in mind safety concerns with the rest of the community."</p> <p>Officials said they don't want to just shift the homeless from from street to street.</p> <p>"It is not our intention to move folks from one area to another and have that," Carbone said. "We really do want to help get these folks housed."</p> <p>City officials said there are three different locations they're working to grow the city's shelter capacity while some are closer to completion than others.</p> <p>One of those Is a plot of land on Martin Luther King Jr. Way near 23rd Street.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Police union: SPD officer staffing 'crisis'
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-officers-guild-president-paints-grave-picture-of-officer-shortage
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The president of the Seattle police union is raising questions about the number of officers who have left the Seattle Police Department, suggesting the agency is not being fully forthcoming about the true number of people who have left the department in recent months.</p> <p>Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers' Guild, is painting a grave picture of the situation facing the city's police department.</p> <p>"This crisis is going to be a year's long endeavor to try and get us out of this hole," he said on a recent episode of his podcast, Hold the Line with Mike Solan, adding that the numbers reported by the department aren't telling the whole story. "Maybe there's a mistake there or maybe they're not as accurate as they could be."</p>

It stems back from the report to the Seattle City Council at the end of April.

Interim police Chief Adrian Diaz told the council that between January to March, 43 people left his department, which hired 13.

Solan says that's an underestimation when it comes to departures.

"Year-to-date separations, and this is absolutely accurate, is 60," Solan said. "This is a red alert folks. We're providing the accurate numbers to you."

Solan said the department only has 959 total personnel available.

Police told KOMO News they currently have 842 patrol officers and 139 sergeants.

"I'm not sure how he gets his numbers," said Patrick Michaud, a detective with SPD, referring to Solan's data. "He hasn't really shared the methodology."

Michaud said the department's numbers are provided by the city's Human Resources Department.

"It's our most trustworthy numbers," he said, adding that the biggest issues continue to be finding the right candidates to hire and retaining the officers already in the force. "If we don't have some level of incentive, it's really tough to go, 'But look!'"

Which, according to Diaz, means officers aren't responding to 911 calls in a timely manner.

"We need a political narrative shift to keep the current people from leaving," Solan said.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Edmonds 'proactive approach' to homeless
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/politics/edmonds-city-council-defends-law-to-fine-those-who-refuse-shelter-despite-new-concerns
GIST	<p>EDMONDS, Wash. — Members of the Edmonds City Council say they are taking a proactive approach to keep people from camping in parks and other public spaces, but there are new concerns over whether it will work.</p> <p>A just-passed ordinance means homeless campers who turn down shelter can now face steep fines, even though shelter space in the area remains limited.</p> <p>The new rule would make it a misdemeanor for someone to camp overnight or store their belongings on public property.</p> <p>"We deal with them with our businesses," said Kyle Huggman, owner of Demetri's Woodstone Taverna, adding that he can only do so much to help the homeless outside his restaurant in downtown Edmonds. "We try and help them if they need help and move them on and refer them on to other places."</p> <p>He's glad the City Council approved the ordinance Tuesday night that bans overnight camping on public property. He believes it's a better way to connect people with resources.</p> <p>"It's kind of that last resort when someone's intractable and they're not willing to accept support and help," City Council President Vivian Olson said.</p> <p>That means homeless campers who turn down shelter face fines up to \$1,000 or up to 90 days in jail. But, some locals are already questioning how that could work.</p>

	<p>“It seems to be foolish, at best,” said Sharon Rugh, who lives in Edmonds. “It seems to be counter-productive. First of all, they couldn’t afford the fine and second of all, they don’t have a place for people to stay.”</p> <p>“I’m not sure how you would enforce that, so I’m not really sure,” Kamiki McWhirter of Edmonds said. “That’s a pretty big fine.”</p> <p>Olson said next steps for those who can’t afford the steep fines include community service.</p> <p>Olson adds this new rule is only enforceable as long as there are open beds for the homeless.</p> <p>The city's shelter options are limited to a small shelter in Lynnwood, but that the city is working to get more shelter space.</p> <p>“Until then, we are relying on motel vouchers and shelter space a little farther out, when it’s available,” Olson said. “I don’t think we’re looking at a huge commitment of ongoing officers to deal with this ordinance.”</p> <p>To get more shelter beds in the city, the police chief in an emailed statement told KOMO News that the group Housing Hope has a large project planned in Edmonds. The city is also in talks with Snohomish County to acquire and operate a motel respite program. But, that's still in the early stages.</p> <p>The city continues to hand out motel vouchers but could not say Wednesday how many people are taking advantage of that program.</p> <p>They estimate there are about 450 homeless people within their jurisdiction.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Weekend ‘unity’ block party in Renton
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/weekend-block-party-in-renton-to-provide-resources-promote-equality-and-denounce-violence
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. - The rise in crime and violence in south King County is sparking outrage amongst residents, but it's also sparking a call to action.</p> <p>Communities like Des Moines, Federal Way, Kent, Renton and Tukwila saw high numbers of property and violent crimes in 2021. The property crime numbers are already nearing the halfway point in most of those communities this year.</p> <p>Anthony Curtis is one man who wants to help change that and the people affected. He said for every problem, he is going to work hard to find a solution. Curtis said he believes the problem stems from generations of oppression against Black people and the hardships still felt today.</p> <p>"It's time to get to the table with some tangible resources with some things that's going to really uplift the community and end a lot of this violence, end a lot of this racism," said Curtis.</p> <p>Violence and racism are what Curtis said has overwhelmed the Black community in south King County. It's the reason why he's hosting a community resource event and block party to cultivate a place of unity and encouragement.</p> <p>"We want to promote health and wealth in the Black community. We want to let them know. That's why the financial literacy coach is coming out, that's why real estate agents and business owners and entrepreneurs are coming out to speak to our community and let young people and people in general know that they overcame circumstances," said Curtis.</p>

The [event](#) will be Saturday, May 21, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Safeway in Renton, located at 200 South 3rd Street. That particular store has had its challenges with theft and criminal activity. However, it's the very place Curtis and the Black Equality Coalition wanted to host the event, hoping to change the narrative of the neighborhood and the mindset of the people affected by the crime.

"To help prevent people from going to prison, preventing them from living house to house or sleeping on couches or not having no place to stay. We want to empower the community with love, with food, with clothes," said Curtis.

During the event, Black business owners will give presentations on equality and justice. Vendors will also be giving away free food, clothing and haircuts.

The idea of the event stems from the work Curtis has done to promote change within himself and his job with UPS. Curtis, a part-time supervisor, and UPS have been working internally to make the workplace more inclusive. It was a shift he felt necessary after the 2020 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Floyd's death sparked hostility nationwide, but for Curtis it launched a conversation.

"I'm not here to antagonize you, I'm here to get this mutual understanding and just hold conversation. So, it was rocky, it was rough, it was difficult. But we made it work and we had phenomenal outcomes, phenomenal result," said Curtis.

Some of those results included community clean-up projects with UPS, the Black Equality Coalition and volunteers. The collaborations motivated them to do even more for the community, like the upcoming block party hosted at Safeway. Curtis said the event is expected to be the biggest community event between the partnerships.

"The biggest thing is building a bridge of unity—love and resources between corporate and community," said Curtis. "We're better together, we make a greater impact."

The hope is to promote positive change in the community that could ultimately help curb crime and violence.

"I can't focus too much on all the violence that's going on, I have to keep focusing on the solution. I have to keep focusing on getting people to volunteer, to help, to come out, to lock arms with us to help us push the vision and mission to uplift the people," said Curtis.

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HEADLINE	05/18 New police-use-of-force investigation office
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/gov-inslee-announces-new-director-for-was-police-use-of-force-investigation-office
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - Washington Governor Jay Inslee appointed a director for the state's new police use-of-force investigation office.</p> <p>Inslee held a press conference Wednesday and announced Roger Rogoff as the director of the Office of Independent Investigations (OII). Rogoff's appointment officially starts June 16.</p> <p>The OII was established in May 2021 and is designed to "provide competent, unbiased, and thorough investigations of police use of deadly force," according to Inslee, but exists wholly removed from the police department to provide more transparency.</p> <p>Rogoff most recently served as legal counsel for Microsoft, specializing in data privacy and public safety. Before that, he was a judge in King County Superior Court, and presided over juvenile court for three years. Inslee said Rogoff also worked 13 years as a senior deputy prosecuting attorney for King County, six years as an assistant U.S. Attorney, two years as a criminal defense attorney and served on the Washington State Criminal Justice Task Force.</p>

	Rogoff graduated from Emory University and earned a law degree at the University of Washington School of Law.
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HEADLINE	05/18 Seattle begins search for next police chief
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/mayor-bruce-harrell-announces-search-committee-for-seattles-next-police-chief/
GIST	<p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell announced Wednesday a committee of local elected officials and community leaders to drive the search for a new police chief, after committing to the search in March.</p> <p>Since Harrell took office in January he has repeatedly expressed his satisfaction with interim Chief Adrian Diaz, who he encouraged to apply for the permanent role in March and who has temporarily held the role since former Chief Carmen Best resigned in 2020. A spokesperson for the police department confirmed Wednesday that Diaz has applied for the permanent position.</p> <p>But, the mayor must consider at least three applicants from a national search, according to the city's charter.</p> <p>To conduct the national search, the city has hired the Public Sector Search & Consulting firm, which led the city's 2018 search for a chief and has conducted searches for cities including Bellevue, San Francisco and Dallas, Texas, for \$75,000.</p> <p>Thoughtful input from public safety advocates and residents across Seattle will play a critical role in our search for our next permanent Chief of Police," Harrell said in a news release Wednesday.</p> <p>"Not only will the person we hire be tasked with leading our department and addressing rising crime and gun violence, they'll also need to be a partner in developing innovative public safety solutions and working alongside the community to respond to local needs and build trust."</p> <p>Applications for the position are due July 5. The firm will present a list of applicants to the search committee, which will be tasked with identifying five finalists for the mayor to consider.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the mayor said Harrell hopes to have an appointment to present to the city council for approval in the fall.</p> <p>In addition to the committee and firm, Harrell says he will collect input from the public through a survey and new website, available at seattle.gov/mayor/one-seattle-initiatives/chief-search. Both are available in English, Amharic, Chinese (traditional), Korean, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.</p> <p>The search committee includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seattle City Council President Debora Juarez • Seattle City Councilmember and Public Safety and Human Services Committee Chair Lisa Herbold • Lieutenant Scott Bachler, Seattle Police Management Association • Prachi Dave, policy and advocacy director, Public Defender Association; Commissioner, Community Police Commission • Gabe Galanda, managing lawyer, Galanda Broadman, PLLC • Erin Goodman, executive director, Sodo Business Improvement Area • Esther Lucero, CEO, Seattle Indian Health Board • Jim Pugel, former SPD Chief of Police • Robert Saka, former King County Charter Commission Member • Rachel Smith, president & CEO, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce • Mary Ellen Stone, CEO, King County Sexual Assault Resource Center

- Reverend Harriett Walden, Founder, Mothers for Police Accountability; co-chair, Community Police Commission
- Natalie Walton-Anderson, Criminal Division chief, Seattle City Attorney's Office
- Bishop Reggie Witherspoon, Mount Calvary Christian Center

Applications for the position can be submitted to Gary Peterson at Gary@PublicSectorSearch.com until 4 p.m. on July 5.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/18 Water industry ransomware uninsurable
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/water-industry-ransomware-insurance/
GIST	<p>More water companies are finding they are uninsurable as ransomware attacks against the sector grow, water utility and association executives said Wednesday.</p> <p>Insurers are increasingly requiring water utilities to meet stringent cybersecurity requirements to even consider insuring them, said Nick Santillo, the vice president for digital infrastructure and security at American Water, a public utility. These requirements include a strong secure access management program for protecting administrative credentials with privileged accounts, as well as endpoint detection and response tools.</p> <p>“There are a lot of companies that have gone through their renewals and ended up either becoming uninsurable or have implemented some new controls in order just to get to the point of being insurable,” Santillo told an audience of water company executives gathered in Washington, D.C. for a National Association of Water Companies (NAWC) conference.</p> <p>The scope of what insurers are covering is also narrowing as costs go up, said Kevin Morley, the manager of federal relations at the American Water Works Association.</p> <p>CEOs of major insurance companies said last year that cyber insurance premiums sector-wide had spiked dramatically, with AIG's chief executive saying rates increased by 40% while Chubb CEO Evan Greenberg said his company's rates were increasing sharply yet still didn't properly capture the risk posed by a major cyber event.</p> <p>Ransomware is driving most of the cyber insurance woes, accounting for 75% of all cyber insurance claims in the summer of 2021 compared to 55% in 2016, according to the credit ratings agency AM Best.</p> <p>Adding to the difficulty of assessing the risks the water sector faces from ransomware is the fact that some water companies don't report ransomware incidents, said Elke Sobieraj, the director for critical infrastructure cybersecurity at the White House's National Security Council.</p> <p>“We just don't know what we don't know,” Sobieraj said in an interview with CyberScoop. “A water utility could be attacked and not report it to the FBI, especially if it's a smaller entity.”</p> <p>Sobieraj said the White House is focused on liability protection so that water companies feel they can report to the EPA, CISA or the FBI and “understand they are protected, their name won't be out there that they had an incident.”</p> <p>She hailed the passage of a cyber incident reporting bill in March, which requires critical infrastructure entities like water companies to report incidents to the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency within 72 hours.</p>

	<p>The insurance crisis the water sector faces is being discussed in water company boardrooms nationwide, said Rob Powelson, the president and CEO of NAWC.</p> <p>“The insurance markets can’t sustain paying for these ransomware attacks over time,” Powelson said. “Your average ransomware attack is running between \$5 to \$8 million ... What if you have four of them within one fiscal year? How can an insurer in good conscience be able to make those payments?”</p> <p>Powelson said it is likely inevitable that the costs of ransomware attacks and insuring against them will be passed on to consumers over time, particularly since many water companies are supported by private investors.</p> <p>He said the water sector in particular faces difficulty even tracking how large a problem ransomware is because of fragmentation. There are 51,000 drinking water systems nationwide, he said, compared to 3,200 electric distribution companies. An estimated 85% of water companies are municipal, and many are very small.</p> <p>Powelson said he was pleased the insurance industry participated in a cybersecurity summit the White House convened in the summer.</p> <p>“It was important because that is something that is kind of a looming issue that could have a profound impact,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Ransom demands surge 45% in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ransom-demands-surge-45-in-2021/
GIST	<p>The average ransom demand in 2021 was \$247,000, 45% more than the previous year, with most threat actors trying to force payment via double extortion tactics, according to Group-IB.</p> <p>The security vendor’s Ransomware Uncovered 2021/2022 report was compiled from an analysis of over 700 investigations undertaken by its incident response team.</p> <p>It claimed the continued rise of ransomware is down to the proliferation of initial access brokers and ransomware-as-a-service offerings on the dark web.</p> <p>The report argued that more sophisticated threats made it harder for victims to recover: the average downtime from an attack rose from 18 to 22 days year-on-year.</p> <p>However, on the plus side, attacker dwell time fell from 13 days to nine over the same period. That limits the time in which threat actors have to move laterally within networks, steal data and deploy their ransomware payload.</p> <p>Data theft and threatened leakage were used in 63% of attacks last year as a method of forcing payment, Group-IB said.</p> <p>Lockbit, Conti and Pysa were the most aggressive in posting data to leak sites. However, it was two newcomers, Hive and Grief, that caught the eye – making it on the top 10 list of ransomware gangs by number of victims posted to leak sites.</p> <p>The former demanded an outrageous \$240m ransom from MediaMarkt, the largest of the year and of all time.</p> <p>Grief was actually a rebrand from DoppelPaymer, an increasingly popular tactic for threat actors keen to avoid sanctions and scrutiny from investigators.</p>

	<p>“Given multiple rebrands forced by law enforcement actions as well as the merging of TTPs due to the constant migration of affiliates from one ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) program to another, it is becoming increasingly challenging for security professionals to keep track of the ever-evolving tactics and tools of ransomware threat actors,” warned the head of Group-IB’s data forensics and incident response team, Oleg Skulkin.</p> <p>Remote desktop protocol (RDP) remains the top vector for attacks (47%), followed by phishing (26%). More attacks were facilitated by exploits of public-facing applications last year (21%) than in 2020 (17%).</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Bad bots swarm internet at record numbers
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/bad-bots-internet-record-numbers/
GIST	<p>Malicious bots accounted for almost 28% of global web traffic in 2021, a record high that exceeded the previous year’s figure of 26%, according to Imperva.</p> <p>Bots are software apps that run automated tasks. However, while most of them perform legitimate work such as crawling and indexing the internet for search engines, an increasing number are being used for malign purposes.</p> <p>The most common of these last year were account takeover (ATO), content or price scraping and scalping to obtain limited-availability items, Imperva claimed.</p> <p>Its 2022 Imperva Bad Bot Report is based on a detailed analysis of this malicious activity.</p> <p>It found that two-thirds of this traffic could be traced to “evasive bad bots” – software that uses the latest evasion techniques to circumvent security tools. These include cycling through random IPs, entering sites and apps through anonymous proxies, changing identities and mimicking human behavior to evade detection.</p> <p>Some 36% of bad bots hid as mobile web browsers in 2021, with Safari the most popular choice due to its enhanced privacy settings. Imperva claimed that this enabled threat actors to remain hidden while carrying out their attacks.</p> <p>As a result of the increase in malicious bot traffic, ATO attacks soared by 148% from 2020 to 2021, allowing scammers to access sensitive account information and potentially carry out fraudulent transactions.</p> <p>Financial services was the most targeted industry (35%) in this regard, followed by travel (23%), with the US the leading origin country of ATO attacks (54%) in 2021.</p> <p>Overall, travel (34%), retail (34%) and financial services (9%) were the sectors most targeted by bad bots in 2021, which stands to reason given the large amounts of sensitive data stored in customer accounts and the potential for monetization.</p> <p>“Businesses cannot overlook the impact of malicious bot activity as it is contributing to more account compromise, higher infrastructure and support costs, customer churn, and degraded online services,” said Imperva VP of application security, Ryan Windham.</p> <p>“With automated fraud growing in intensity and complexity, advanced bot protection is essential for preventing the growing threat digital businesses and consumers face from bad bots.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Fake crypto sites lure wannabe thieves
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fake-crypto-sites-lure-wannabe-thieves-by-spamming-login-credentials/

GIST

Threat actors are luring potential thieves by spamming login credentials for other people account's on fake crypto trading sites, illustrating once again, that there is no honor among thieves.

This new cryptocurrency scam is gaining traction recently, involving emails and texts sharing credentials to an online trading account holding 30 Bitcoin for them to withdraw, which today trades for around \$900,000.

The phishing email, seen by security analyst Jan Kopriva, informs the recipient that a deposit of 30 BTC has been added to an account on the Orbitcoin trading platform.

In the email, the crooks include a customer ID (username) and a password, essentially luring the targets into logging into the system to access the stored bitcoin.

The Orbitcoin platform is fake, but the scammers have done an excellent job creating a convincing website that looks like an actual crypto exchange, at least to careless visitors.

At the time of writing this, the scam site remains online, although some anti-virus tools with internet security functions flag it as malicious.

[Kopriva](#) decided to follow the steps and record his way into the scam to do a write-up on the [ISC forums](#).

The scamming process

If the email recipient believes the message was sent to them by mistake and decides to access "Rob Hoffman's" money, they can use the sent credentials to log into the account on Orbitcoin.

After going through a two-factor authentication step via SMS or automated phone call, which further raises the simulated legitimacy of Orbitcoin, the victim is allowed to access the account.

The fake trading platform indeed displays 30 BTC as the available amount on the account, but for the first withdrawal, it doesn't allow amounts over 0.0001 BTC, supposedly for security reasons.

Because bank account withdrawals aren't available, the victim makes the transfer to a Bitcoin wallet, and they are left with 29.9999 BTC.

The trick that comes into play here is that the account owner, supposedly Rob, had set a minimum withdrawal limit of 30.006 BTC upon creating the portfolio.

The victim believes that all they need to access the \$900,000 would be to add the equivalent of roughly \$180, which, of course, goes straight into the scammer's pocket.

Kopriva noticed that the provided Bitcoin wallet address for depositing this amount is empty, but this could be just one of the many addresses the scammers are using, constantly rotating them to tackle reporting and evade tracing.

BleepingComputer is aware of threat actors using this scam with other cryptocurrencies, including Tether (USDT) and Ethereum.

Spotting the fraud

These campaigns are yet another example of how much effort threat actors put into their scams to look convincing, especially when they add 2FA validation, security withdrawal limits, etc.

Although users should never click on links embedded in emails, if you end up on a website this way, pay close attention to signs of fraud.

In this case, the contact section doesn't even list an email or a telephone number, making customer support agents only available from within the account dashboard.

	<p>Additionally, the provided address corresponds to a horse farm in the UK, while the company registration details in the footer belong to a stainless steel product manufacturer.</p> <p>Another sign of fraud would be using "Private User" as the account holder's name, which is also a potential indication that the scammers use more names besides Rob Hoffman.</p> <p>The inclusion of credentials for a newly created account in the email is strange by itself, considering that Hoffman supposedly had already set a withdrawal limit, and hence, he already had access to the account.</p> <p>Finally, and most important, while it may be tempting to login to the person's account and see if the funds exist, doing so could potentially be illegal, if not not ethically wrong, to do so.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Govt. recovers \$15M from '3ve' online fraud
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-recovers-15-million-from-global-kovter-ad-fraud-operation/
GIST	<p>The US government has recovered over \$15 million from Swiss bank accounts belonging to operators behind the '3ve' online advertising fraud scheme.</p> <p>Switzerland transferred \$15,111,453.84 to the US government as part of a Final Order of Forfeiture related to United States v. Sergey Ovsyannikov, one of the conspirators in the global ad fraud campaign.</p> <p>In 2018, the Department of Justice announced an indictment against Aleksandr Zhukov, Boris Timokhin, Mikhail Andreev, Denis Avdeev, Dmitry Novikov, Sergey Ovsyannikov, Aleksandr Isaev, and Yevgeniy Timchenko for their involvement in the 3ve ad fraud botnet.</p> <p>While Ovsyannikov, Zhukov, and Timchenko have been arrested and sentenced, the rest remain free.</p> <p>At its peak, the 3ve ad fraud campaign, also known as Eve, infected over 1.7 million devices with the Kovter botnet, a click-fraud malware that would quietly run in the background while connecting to sites to consume advertisements.</p> <p>As part of this criminal operation, the threat actors worked with legitimate advertisers and agencies to display advertisements on websites. However, these advertisements were not placed on legitimate publisher's sites but rather on 86,000 spoofed domains created by the criminal operation.</p> <p>The campaign would then direct the devices infected with Kovter to connect to these sites to view their ads. To the advertisers, these appeared as legitimate ad impressions, for which they were billed.</p> <p>From December 2015 through October 2018, the operation fraudulently billed advertisers over \$29 million for ads that real visitors never saw. At its peak, the criminal operation generated between 3 and 12 billion daily ad bid requests every day.</p> <p>“This forfeiture is the largest international cybercrime recovery in the history of the Eastern District of New York and sends a powerful message to those involved in cyber fraud that there are no boundaries to prosecuting these bad actors and locating their ill-gotten assets wherever they are in the world,” stated United States Attorney Peace in a press release</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Ransom gangs weaponizing vulnerabilities
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransomware-gangs-rely-more-on-weaponizing-vulnerabilities/

Security researchers are warning that external remote access services continue to be the main vector for ransomware gangs to breach company networks but there's a notable uptick in exploiting vulnerabilities.

Along with phishing and exploiting vulnerabilities in a public-facing application, these are the primary methods of compromise that ultimately lead to threat actors stealing data and encrypting systems.

According to cybersecurity company Group-IB, threat actors are commonly targeting remote desktop (RDP) servers exposed on the web for initial access into a network.

Compromised credentials are also popular with some ransomware affiliates, who use the logins to attack the infrastructure from the inside.

Vulnerability exploitation on the rise

The cybersecurity company [notes in a report](#) today that last year ransomware gangs started to focus on multiple vulnerabilities in public-facing applications, and moved quickly to adding exploits for newly disclosed security issues.

Among the most notable vulnerabilities that Group-IB identified as being used by ransomware threat actors in 2021 are the following:

- CVE-2021-20016 (SonicWall SMA100 SSL VPN)
- CVE-2021-26084 (Atlassian Confluence)
- CVE-2021-26855 (Microsoft Exchange)
- CVE-2021-27101, CVE-2021-27102, CVE-2021-27103, and CVE-2021-27104 (Accellion FTA)
- CVE-2021-30116 (Kaseya VSA)
- CVE-2021-34473, CVE-2021-34523, and CVE-2021-31207 (Microsoft Exchange)
- CVE-2021-35211 (SolarWinds)

A recently published [joint report](#) from Cyber Security Works, Securin, Cyware, and Ivanti notes that the number of vulnerabilities associated with ransomware attacks has grown to 310 in the first quarter of 2022. The companies identified 22 new security issues being exploited by ransomware gangs in the first months of the year, an 7.6% increase since December 2021.

Not all bugs are new, though. Half of the flaws recently linked to ransomware attacks were disclosed in 2019. However, public exploits exist for many of them, which makes the attacker's job much easier.

In the first quarter of 2022, the four companies found that ransomware actors were actively exploiting a total of 157 vulnerabilities, slightly more than in the previous quarter.

Techniques and tools

Looking at the threat actors' leak sites, Group-IB says that ransomware gangs published information from 3,500 victims, most of them based in the U.S. (1,655).

The most aggressive ransomware operations in 2021 were LockBit and Conti (also confirmed in reports from other companies), each with a victim count of 670 and 640, respectively. The third spot was occupied by Pysa, with data from 186 victims published on their leak site.

The company's digital forensics and incident response (DFIR) team investigated more than 700 ransomware attacks last year and found that data exfiltration had occurred in 63% of the cases.

Based on data collected from these incidents, Group-IB estimates that the ransom demand averaged \$247,000 last year.

Data exfiltration remains a strong tactic for ransomware actors to pressure victims into paying a ransom. Some gangs have gone as far as creating custom tools and offering them to affiliates.

	<p>For instance, LockBit provides an automated data collection module called StealBit, while BlackMatter had the ExMatter tool. These utilities selected files for exfiltration based on specific extensions or keywords, that were more likely to include valuable information for the attackers.</p> <p>Among the techniques observed by Group-IB in ransomware attacks, at the top of the chart are the use of command and scripting interpreters and remote services, both being part of all attacks that the researchers investigated</p> <p>Additionally, the adversaries also used various methods to discover remote systems, steal credentials (Mimikatz, Lazagne), and disable security tools.</p> <p>As for the tools used in various steps of an attack, Group-IB created a top 10, where SoftPerfect Network Scanner is at the head of the list.</p> <p>In more than half of the investigated ransomware incidents, the researchers found a Cobalt Strike beacon, a common tool for post-exploitation stages as it allows a wide range of actions (script execution, logging keystrokes, file downloads).</p> <p>Oleg Skulkin, head of Group-IB's DFIR team, says that merging tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) due to affiliates migrating from one ransomware operation to another makes it difficult for security professionals to keep track of the methods this adversary adopts.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Chinese 'Space Pirates' target Russia firms
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-space-pirates-are-hacking-russian-aerospace-firms/
GIST	<p>A previously unknown Chinese hacking group known as 'Space Pirates' targets enterprises in the Russian aerospace industry with phishing emails to install novel malware on their systems.</p> <p>The threat group is believed to have started operating in 2017, and while it has links to known groups like APT41 (Winnti), Mustang Panda, and APT27, it is thought to be a new cluster of malicious activity.</p> <p>Russian threat analysts at Positive Technologies named the group "Space Pirates" due to their espionage operations focusing on stealing confidential information from companies in the aerospace field.</p> <p>In the wild detections</p> <p>The Space Pirates APT group has been seen targeting government agencies and enterprises involved in IT services, aerospace, and electric power industries located in Russia, Georgia, and Mongolia.</p> <p>The threat analysts first discovered signs of Space Pirates' activity last summer during incident response and quickly confirmed that the threat actors used the same malware and infrastructure against at least four more domestic entities since 2019.</p> <p>Two of these cases concern Russian companies with state participation, which the hackers successfully compromised.</p> <p>In the first case, the threat actors maintained their access to 20 servers for ten months, stealing over 1,500 documents, employee details, and other sensitive data.</p> <p>In the second case, the Chinese hackers stayed in the network of the compromised company for over a year, siphoning confidential information and installing their malware to 12 corporate network nodes in three distinct regions.</p> <p>Novel malware</p>

The arsenal of Space Pirates consists of custom loaders hiding behind decoy documents, slightly modified backdoors that have been around for years, the Chinese trademark malware PlugX, and tailored spins of the PcShare backdoor.

Moreover, Space Pirates' attacks have also employed ShadowPad, Zupdax, PoisonIvy, and ReVBSHELL in attacks.

In addition to the above, the newly discovered APT uses three previously undocumented modular malware tools, namely Deed RAT, BH_A006, and MyKLoadClient.

MyKLoadClient is a loader using SFX archives combined with DLL side-loading through an auxiliary launcher library signed by McAfee Inc. The launcher supports commands that give the threat actors close control over the infection.

BH_A006 is a heavily modified version of the Gh0st backdoor, featuring many layers of obfuscation to bypass security protections and thwart analysis.

Its features include network service creation, UAC bypassing, and shellcode unpacking and launching in the memory.

Another interesting custom tool is Deed RAT, which features an unusual, intelligent method of transferring control to the shellcode.

Deed RAT's functions depend on which plugins are fetched and loaded. For example, PT has seen eight plugins for startup, C2 config, installation, code injection into processes, network interactions, connection management, registry editing, registry monitoring, and proxy sniffing.

The supported protocols for C2 communication include TCP, TLS, HTTP, HTTPS, UDP, and DNS, so there's generally a high level of versatility.

The commands supported by Deed RAT are the following:

- Collect system information
- Create a separate communication channel for a plugin
- Self-remove
- Ping
- Deactivate connection
- Update the shellcode for an injection stored in the registry
- Update the main shellcode on disk and delete all plugins

Chinese convolution

The threat analysts believe that the overlaps between various Chinese APTs are due to tool exchanges, a common phenomenon for hackers in the region.

Using shared tools further obscures the traces of distinct threat groups and makes the work of analysts a lot harder, so Chinese APTs have multiple reasons to follow this practice.

Space Pirates has also been seen deploying their custom malware on some Chinese firms for financial gains, so the threat group might have a dual function.

Chinese hackers have been very aggressive against Russian targets lately, as confirmed by recent findings of analysts at [Secureworks](#) and [Google](#).

Espionage is a standard operation for Chinese APTs, and Russia is a valid target that excels in aerospace, weapons, electrical engineering, shipbuilding, and nuclear technology.

HEADLINE	05/18 CISA warns: patch VMWare products now
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/cisa-patching-new-vmware-bugs-is-a-full-on-emergency
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) has issued an emergency directive requiring federal civilian executive branch agencies to update their VMWare products impacted by a pair of new vulnerabilities or remove them from their networks.</p> <p>The VMWare bugs – CVE-2022-22972 and CVE-2022-22973 – expose several VMWare products to remote code-execution (RCE) attacks.</p> <p>CISA said that last month, within just 48 hours of VMware patching its VMware Workspace ONE Access (Access), VMware Identity Manager (vIDM), VMware vRealize Automation (vRA), VMware Cloud Foundation, and vRealize Suite Lifecycle Manager, advanced persistent threat (APT) actors were able to reverse-engineer the updates to launch attacks.</p> <p>"These vulnerabilities pose an unacceptable risk to federal network security," said CISA director Jen Easterly in a statement. "CISA has issued this emergency directive to ensure that federal civilian agencies take urgent action to protect their networks. We also strongly urge every organization – large and small – to follow the federal government's lead and take similar steps to safeguard their networks."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Vulnerable maritime supply chain
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/vulnerable-maritime-supply-chain-threat-global-economy?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Merchant vessels and ports are extraordinarily vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks against OT systems</p> <p>Around 90% to 95% of all shipped goods at some stage travel by sea. This makes the global maritime industry the world's single largest and most important supply chain. Successful cyberattacks against the maritime supply chain would have the potential to damage individual companies, national finances and even the global economy.</p> <p>Attack vectors</p> <p>The maritime sector includes the ports and the vessels that use them. The vessels range from small freight carriers to oil supertankers, super cargo carriers transporting in excess of 20,000 20-foot containers, and superyachts carrying high value individuals. While the port authorities are already under threat and attack by ransomware gangs, less attention has been paid to the threat of attacks against the vessels.</p> <p>The merchant maritime sector functions with vessels that have been operational for anything from a few years to a few decades. The older vessels have had new technology added to improve efficiency through digitization and automation. Updating this technology can be very expensive and will depend on various criteria: opportunity, cost/risk assessments, economic strength of the company, and regulatory requirements. The result is that many ships in the merchant maritime sector are vulnerable to cyberattack.</p> <p>Superyachts tend to be new and packed with the very latest gadgetry. They tend to be more secure, although successful compromise offers an attacker greater control over the vessel. For example, a successful attack could give remote control over both throttle and rudder.</p> <p>John Sheehy, SVP of research and strategy at IOActive, points to three primary paths for an attacker to gain access to a vessel. "There's WIFI; some vessels have High Frequency (HF) radio; and commercial satellite communications (SATCOM) such as Inmarsat," he told <i>SecurityWeek</i>. To these we should add the USB stick -carrying insider, and earlier compromises to the vessel's own supply chain.</p> <p>The satellite communications often combine Inmarsat and GPS, and he considers this to be the primary threat vector – adding, "We know that a Russian APT group has the capability to remotely exploit the same types of SATCOM terminals used in maritime environments on vessels."</p>

Tom Van De Wiele, principal technology and threat researcher at [F-Secure](#), adds, “Attacks aimed at communication links can be targeted at either the vessel communication links themselves using satellite communication or the port infrastructure on shore used to communicate with the vessels at sea. This is linked to the back-end systems of the shipping IT infrastructure for container and ship monitoring systems.”

Practical and theoretical effects of maritime supply chain damage

There are no known serious examples of vessel compromise, but the potential effect can be seen in genuine maritime mishaps and in theoretical analyses. Genuine mishaps would include the Torrey Canyon in 1967, and the Ever Given in 2021.

The supertanker SS Torrey Canyon ran aground on rocks off the south-west coast of the UK, spilling an estimated 100+ million liters of crude oil. The ensuing environmental catastrophe led to aircraft from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force bombing the wreck to ignite the spillage.

The Ever Given, a 400 meters long container ship that can carry more than 20,000 containers, ran aground in the Suez Canal in March 2021, and blocked it. The knock-on effect of this blockage was immense. Professor Kevin Jones, the executive dean of science and technology at Plymouth university (UK), comments. “Closing down one maritime supply route can cause a knock-on log jam that affects the world economy at the rate of billions of dollars every day,” he told *SecurityWeek*.

“There have been various estimates about the cost of the Suez closure, but some of them are as high as ten or eleven billion dollars a day, and those estimates were done before it was clear how long and how expensive it would be to clear the backlog that the blockage caused. Months later, there were still ships queuing up to get into [Port of Los Angeles](#) because the whole scheduling pattern had been broken.”

Jones is the lead for the Universities Maritime Cyber Threats Research Group. He runs a cyber risk laboratory at Plymouth – and was instrumental in developing the [MaCRA \(marine cyber risk assessment\) technology](#). His team did a theoretical analysis on the potential effect of closing just four major UK ports, perhaps by causing a blockage like the Ever Given. It was a thought experiment, but no less valid for that.

“If you look at things like oil reserves, fresh food reserves, and other critical things within the UK, we have some reserves but need to receive new shipments daily. The UK has about 11 significant ports, but most container shipments come through just four ports. If those ports were effectively jammed in the ways we’ve shown we can do for other ports, it would mean that the supply of goods coming into the UK would drop dramatically – for the sake of discussion, very close to zero.”

Removing the blocking vessels would take weeks rather than days. “Assuming the attacker could pick the conditions, coordinate the attacks in the way they want to – which is difficult, but not impossible,” he continued, “you’ve basically cut off the supply of goods to the UK: we’re not getting fresh foodstuffs and we’re not getting oil. Very quickly we’ll arrive at the point where power stations no longer have the capacity to run. There are strategic reserves that could be released, but there are consequences and logistic difficulties to doing that. So, you start losing power, you start losing freezer capacity – and frozen stores, both in homes and in bulk storage, go rotten within a week. You cascade all these effects – including loss of fuel for transport– and it is not long before you have a catastrophic failure of systems. It’s not the most likely scenario, but it is a scenario that is well within the bounds of possibility.”

A similar exercise was done in the US by University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “They looked at closing just one port in Florida,” said Jones, “and they got to the point in their thought experiment where people on the east coast were shooting each other quite quickly. The general principle is that we are highly dependent on pretty much real-time resupply via shipping. Cut that out for a while, and you’ve got a real problem.”

Attacker motivations, means and threat scenarios

Motivations for attacking the maritime sector are fundamentally no different to those for any other industry sector. They include ethical/political (hacktivists), financial (cybercriminal gangs), and

geopolitical (nation states). Hactivism may appear the least likely, but there is no technical reason to prevent an attack against a vessel by a determined and well-resourced hactivist group.

The nation-state threat is perhaps the most concerning, which currently includes but goes beyond the Russia/Ukraine war. “For a number of years, it’s been known that in the northwest region around Russia GPS satnav is unreliable,” comments Jones. “It’s unreliable because Russia has been broadcasting spoofed GPS signals. Ships’ captains have reportedly said, ‘I suddenly find myself in the middle of a playing field three miles inland, but when I look out the window, the ocean is still there.’”

In February 2022, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued its annual threat assessment, saying, “Russia is investing in electronic warfare and directed energy weapons to counter western on-orbit assets. These systems work by disrupting or disabling adversary C4ISR [command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] capabilities and by disrupting GPS, tactical and satellite communications, and radars.”

And on March 17, 2022, [CISA issued an alert](#) warning about “possible threats to US and international satellite communication (SATCOM) networks. Successful intrusions into SATCOM networks could create risk in SATCOM network providers’ customer environments.”

“There is evidence that nation states, and Russia in particular, have been experimenting with things like compromising GPS,” continued Jones. “If you go back to previous generations of warfare where things like the Atlantic convoys were a vital lifeline to keep the country going, the attack method was submarines. Today it might well be misdirection to run aground on a sandbank and be delayed until the next spring tide can float you off, or crashing into breakwaters and losing cargo in that way. You can imagine it as a cyber/physical extension of the kind of cyber softening attacks that have been seen in several recent geopolitical campaigns.”

Casey Bisson, head of product and developer relations at [BluBracket](#), comments, “The maritime industry, like all industries, is becoming increasingly dependent on [industrial IoT](#) and connected devices. Common IoT risks like weak default credentials, undocumented backdoors, and vulnerabilities that allow unauthorized remote access and control are especially concerning on vessels. Vessels at sea and in port are both vulnerable to disruption and could potentially be used as weapons in larger state conflicts.”

IOActive’s Sheehy has similar concerns. “The War in Ukraine has caused part of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov to become impassable, which necessarily limits exports and imports to both Russian and Ukrainian Black Sea ports. Of particular concern is Odessa, Ukraine, which is the largest commercial port on the Black Sea. The Russians could choose to use deniable cyber operations as a step up the escalation ladder to impose a cost on those countries who have imposed sanctions on them. Moreover, judicious operations could produce global effects as we saw with the blocking of the Suez Canal by the Ever Given, which was a result of pilot error.”

An extension to the spoofed GPS signals that might confuse a ship’s captain is interference to the ship’s Automatic Identification System (AIS). This could be an approach taken by cybercriminal gangs as part of a piracy scenario.

These systems broadcast identification and location information so that both other ships and shore-based authorities know exactly what ship is where. A compromised AIS could transmit either wrong information (making the ship appear to elsewhere) or no information (making it effectively an invisible ghost ship).

Jones described an example of a theoretical attack against a superyacht (although the basic principles could be harnessed against any vessel).

“Being able to get access to the systems on board the yacht,” he explained, “and to know what the plan is (that is, the charted route), and maybe even to monitor comms to know who’s on board; and then to use a hack on the charting system, you could misdirect the yacht so it thinks it is staying nicely clear in international waters, but you bring it within fast boat range of the Somali coast. At the same time, alter the AIS transponder system so that the vessel is reporting itself as being somewhere, let’s say north, of where

it is supposed to be while it has gone way south. Fast gunboats can come out and take the crew hostage. The yacht may have broadcast an emergency alert, and an interdiction ship may have been dispatched – but it will go to where the AIS is reporting the location. So, there’s a mismatch between actual and reported location, which reduces the risk for kidnappers.”

The maritime sector is already in the crosshairs of the ransomware gangs. “We have certainly seen ransomware affect maritime shipping,” John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at [Netenrich](#), told *SecurityWeek*. “The entire ecosystem is supported by IT systems. When they are compromised, ships may have to wait in port for it to be sorted out, or goods cannot be shipped outbound to their customers. The net effects will look much like supply chain disruptions we have seen over the last year.”

Jasmine Henry, field security director at [JupiterOne](#), agrees that the port itself is a vulnerable part of the maritime ecosystem. “The reason is simple,” she said. “The majority have limited visibility into [ICS systems](#) to even understand which devices exist, let alone apply proper updates or configurations. Merchant vessels and ports are extraordinarily vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated ransomware attacks against unmanaged OT systems, as well as DDoS attacks, command injection, sideloaded malware, and exploited misconfigurations.”

So far, we have seen little evidence of criminal attacks against vessels. “We’ve seen examples of shipping companies being attacked by ransomware,” adds Jones. “They’re not yet the catastrophic attacks with cyber/physical threats that we’ll run your ship aground, play with the ballast and capsize it, or dump its cargo of oil...” But that is surely the logical extension of what is already happening, and what could be done in the future.

The cyber reality

“One of the weird things about my job,” said Professor Jones, “is that I get to look at all the truly horrible things you can do by taking control of a ship. But I try not to be too melodramatic, because there are too many over-hyped horror stories in cybersecurity. While I don’t want small freight companies to go out of business because they cannot afford hundreds of thousands of pounds to update their ships, there is certainly the possibility of both criminal extortion and nation state geopolitical activity using vessels. With some vessels, it would be very hard to mitigate against an attack – sometimes, the crew will have less than a minute to respond – so an attacker with sufficient skill and determination has a high probability of success.”

What is missing from the maritime sector is the ability to do genuine and regular risk assessments. The risk is different for each vessel, and varies depending on the route, cargo, and external threat conditions. To try and solve this problem, Jones and Plymouth university developed the MaCRA maritime cyber risk assessment software. It can provide a continuous risk assessment for individual vessels depending on the state of their onboard technology, their location and the route they are taking, and the cargo they are carrying.

The bottom line today, however, is that the global economy’s single biggest supply chain is vulnerable to cyberattack.

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HEADLINE	05/17 Chaos ransomware variant sides w/Russia
SOURCE	https://www.fortinet.com/blog/threat-research/chaos-ransomware-variant-sides-with-russia?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Since the beginning of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, some ransomware and hacking groups have publicly declared which side they are on. Such actions have created tension internally within the threat actor groups as it has caused dissension, and externally, as organizations fear being targeted due to the political nature of the war.</p> <p>One notable example is the Conti RaaS (Ransomware-as-a-Service) that officially announced in February 2022 that they are backing Russia and would use their arsenal against critical infrastructures that belong to the West. Fear spread quickly as many organizations around the globe had been victimized by the Conti</p>

group in the past, with stolen data exposed and critical files being encrypted. However, the Conti group was bitten back soon after the announcement was made. An allegedly unhappy Conti insider took the matter in their hands and leaked Conti's internal chat logs to the public.

On the other side of the debate, the LockBit ransomware group made it clear that they will not involve themselves in the political war because of the multinational nature of its developers and affiliates.

In this vein, FortiGuard Labs recently came across a variant of the Chaos ransomware that appears to side with Russia....

Conclusion

The Chaos ransomware variant that this blog covers is unique in the sense that the attacker has no intention of providing a decryption tool or file recovery instructions for its victims to recover their affected files. Finding them is a tall order for non-technical victims, which pretty much makes the malware a file destroyer. Clearly, the motive behind this malware is "destruction." The politically inclined messages also indicate that the attacker is pro-Russian and frustrated with the current situation. And with the Chaos ransomware builder now readily available, its options allow anyone to create destructive malware. And with no end to the war in sight, FortiGuard Labs expects more malware like this to emerge.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Texas agency exposes PII for 1.8M workers
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/personal-information-two-million/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The personal information of nearly two million Texans was exposed for nearly three years due to a programming issue at the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI).</p> <p>The department revealed that details of 1.8 million workers who have filed compensation claims were publicly available online from March 2019 to January 2022 in a state audit report published last week. This included Social Security numbers, addresses, dates of birth, phone numbers and information about workers' injuries.</p> <p>In a public notice on March 24, the TDI said it first became aware of a security issue with a TDI web application that manages workers' compensation information on January 4 2022. This issue enabled members of the public to access a protected part of the online application.</p> <p>The TDI, a state agency that oversees the insurance industry in Texas and enforces state regulations, immediately took the application offline, quickly fixed the issue and began an investigation into the nature and scope of the event with a forensics company. It then issued letters to individuals who submitted a new workers' compensation claim between March 2019 and January 2022 to inform them they may</p> <p>The recently published state audit revealed 1.8 million workers were impacted by the leak.</p> <p>In an updated press release published on Tuesday May 17, TDI said the investigation did not find any evidence workers' personal information had been misused. "In January 2022, TDI began an investigation to determine the full nature and scope of the issue, which included working with a forensic company and working to find out whose information was or might have been viewed by people outside of TDI. To date, we are not aware of any misuse of the information," it stated.</p> <p>The department added that it is offering 12 months of credit monitoring and identity protection services at no cost to those who may have been affected.</p> <p>Commenting on the story, Neil Jones, director of cybersecurity evangelism, Egnyte, warned: "The recent data breach at the TDI is especially concerning because worker's compensation data inherently includes PII (Personally Identifiable Information) and PHI (Protected Health Information), which are potential treasure troves for cyber-attackers. Although there's no current evidence that the breached information has</p>

	<p>been used maliciously, it is not uncommon for attackers to wait for just the right time to post their breached data to the Dark Web.”</p> <p>Last year, lawmakers in Texas passed a bill requiring notices to be published online of any data breaches involving the personal information of 250 or more Lone Star State residents.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/17 Smart ID card reader comes with malware
SOURCE	https://krebsonsecurity.com/2022/05/when-your-smart-id-card-reader-comes-with-malware/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Millions of U.S. government employees and contractors have been issued a secure smart ID card that enables physical access to buildings and controlled spaces, and provides access to government computer networks and systems at the cardholder’s appropriate security level. But many government employees aren’t issued an approved card reader device that lets them use these cards at home or remotely, and so turn to low-cost readers they find online. What could go wrong? Here’s one example.</p> <p>KrebsOnSecurity recently heard from a reader — we’ll call him “Mark” because he wasn’t authorized to speak to the press — who works in IT for a major government defense contractor and was issued a Personal Identity Verification (PIV) government smart card designed for civilian employees. Not having a smart card reader at home and lacking any obvious guidance from his co-workers on how to get one, Mark opted to purchase a \$15 reader from Amazon that said it was made to handle U.S. government smart cards.</p> <p>The USB-based device Mark settled on is the first result that currently comes up one when searches on Amazon.com for “PIV card reader.” The card reader Mark bought was sold by a company called Saicoo, whose sponsored Amazon listing advertises a “DOD Military USB Common Access Card (CAC) Reader” and has more than 11,700 mostly positive ratings.</p> <p>The Common Access Card (CAC) is the standard identification for active duty uniformed service personnel, selected reserve, DoD civilian employees, and eligible contractor personnel. It is the principal card used to enable physical access to buildings and controlled spaces, and provides access to DoD computer networks and systems.</p> <p>Mark said when he received the reader and plugged it into his Windows 10 PC, the operating system complained that the device’s hardware drivers weren’t functioning properly. Windows suggested consulting the vendor’s website for newer drivers.</p> <p>So Mark went to the website mentioned on Saicoo’s packaging and found a ZIP file containing drivers for Linux, Mac OS and Windows...</p> <p>Out of an abundance of caution, Mark submitted Saicoo’s drivers file to VirusTotal.com, which simultaneously scans any shared files with more than five dozen antivirus and security products. VirusTotal reported that some 43 different security tools detected the Saicoo drivers as malicious. The consensus seems to be that the ZIP file currently harbors a malware threat known as Ramnit, a fairly common but dangerous trojan horse that spreads by appending itself to other files.</p> <p>Ramnit is a well-known and older threat — first surfacing more than a decade ago — but it has evolved over the years and is still employed in more sophisticated data exfiltration attacks. Amazon said in a written statement that it was investigating the reports.</p> <p>“Seems like a potentially significant national security risk, considering that many end users might have elevated clearance levels who are using PIV cards for secure access,” Mark said.</p> <p>Mark said he contacted Saicoo about their website serving up malware, and received a response saying the company’s newest hardware did not require any additional drivers. He said Saicoo did not address his concern that the driver package on its website was bundled with malware.</p>

In response to KrebsOnSecurity's request for comment, Saicoo sent a somewhat less reassuring reply.

"From the details you offered, issue may probably caused by your computer security defense system as it seems not recognized our rarely used driver & detected it as malicious or a virus," Saicoo's support team wrote in an email.

"Actually, it's not carrying any virus as you can trust us, if you have our reader on hand, please just ignore it and continue the installation steps," the message continued. "When driver installed, this message will vanish out of sight. Don't worry."

The trouble with Saicoo's apparently infected drivers may be little more than a case of a technology company having their site hacked and responding poorly. **Will Dormann**, a vulnerability analyst at CERT/CC, [wrote](#) on Twitter that the executable files (.exe) in the Saicoo drivers ZIP file were not altered by the Ramnit malware — only the included HTML files.

Dormann said it's bad enough that searching for device drivers online is one of the riskiest activities one can undertake online.

"Doing a web search for drivers is a VERY dangerous (in terms of legit/malicious hit ratio) search to perform, based on results of any time I've tried to do it," Dormann [added](#). "Combine that with the apparent due diligence of the vendor outlined here, and well, it ain't a pretty picture."

But by all accounts, the potential attack surface here is enormous, as many federal employees clearly will purchase these readers from a myriad of online vendors when the need arises. Saicoo's product listings, for example, are replete with [comments](#) from customers who self-state that they work at a federal agency (and several who reported problems installing drivers).

A [thread about Mark's experience on Twitter](#) generated a strong response from some of my followers, many of whom apparently work for the U.S. government in some capacity and have government-issued CAC or PIV cards.

Two things emerged clearly from that conversation. The first was general confusion about whether the U.S. government has any sort of list of approved vendors. It does. The **General Services Administration** (GSA), the agency which handles procurement for federal civilian agencies, maintains [a list of approved card reader vendors at idmanagement.gov](#) (Saicoo is not on that list). [Thanks to [@MetaBiometrics](#) and [@shugenja](#) for the link!]

The other theme that ran through the Twitter discussion was the reality that many people find buying off-the-shelf readers more expedient than going through the GSA's official procurement process, whether it's because they were never issued one or the reader they were using simply no longer worked or was lost and they needed another one quickly.

"Almost every officer and NCO [non-commissioned officer] I know in the Reserve Component has a CAC reader they bought because they had to get to their DOD email at home and they've never been issued a laptop or a CAC reader," [said David Dixon](#), an Army veteran and author who lives in Northern Virginia. "When your boss tells you to check your email at home and you're in the National Guard and you live 2 hours from the nearest [non-classified military network installation], what do you think is going to happen?"

Interestingly, anyone asking on Twitter about how to navigate purchasing the right smart card reader and getting it all to work properly is invariably steered toward [militarycac.com](#). The website is maintained by **Michael Danberry**, a decorated and retired Army veteran who launched the site in 2008 (its text and link-heavy design very much takes one back to that era of the Internet and webpages in general). His site has even been [officially recommended by the Army](#) (PDF). Mark shared emails showing Saicoo itself recommends militarycac.com.

	<p>“The Army Reserve started using CAC logon in May 2006,” Danberry wrote on his “About” page. “I [once again] became the ‘Go to guy’ for my Army Reserve Center and Minnesota. I thought Why stop there? I could use my website and knowledge of CAC and share it with you.”</p> <p>Danberry did not respond to requests for an interview — no doubt because he’s busy doing tech support for the federal government. The friendly message on Danberry’s voicemail instructs support-needing callers to leave detailed information about the issue they’re having with CAC/PIV card readers.</p> <p>Dixon said Danberry has “done more to keep the Army running and connected than all the G6s [Army Chief Information Officers] put together.”</p> <p>In many ways, Mr. Danberry is the equivalent of that little known software developer whose tiny open-sourced code project ends up becoming widely adopted and eventually folded into the fabric of the Internet. I wonder if he ever imagined 15 years ago that his website would one day become “critical infrastructure” for Uncle Sam?</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Website: prank call Russian officials
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/robo-prank-call-russian-officials-website/
GIST	<p>ROBOCALLS HAVE BECOME a modern scourge, the destroyer of focus, the nuisance that somehow cannot be eradicated. But perhaps they can, at least, be repurposed to strike a very small and slightly absurd blow against the Russian government's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Today, a group of international hacktivists launched a website, WasteRussianTime.today, designed to combine prank calling and robocalling into an automated weapon of telephonic annoyance targeted at the Russian state. Visit the site, click a button, and it will cycle through a leaked list of Russian government, military, and intelligence phone numbers to connect two random Russian officials—and allow the site's visitor to silently listen in as those officials waste their time trying to figure out why they're speaking to each other and who initiated the call.</p> <p>“We’re hoping for confusion, that they get annoyed, and that these might even be interesting calls to listen to for people who speak Russian,” says one of the site's creators who goes by the name Shera. The group of artists, activists, and coders behind the site is, according to Shera, called the Obfuscated Dreams of Scheherazade. “This war started inside Moscow and St. Petersburg, within the power circle of Putin, and that’s who we want to annoy and disturb.”</p> <p>Since Russia began its full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, hacktivists working independently and even rallied by the Ukrainian government have carried out an unprecedented campaign of hacking operations targeting Russian organizations, some of which have resulted in the theft and leak of hundreds of gigabytes of Russians' emails and other private information. The Ukrainian government itself at one point released a list of what it said were the names and contact details of 620 Russian intelligence agents.</p> <p>Now, by combing through that pile of leaked information, scraping phone numbers from emails, and combining the results with those found in other public sources, the creators of WasteRussianTime.today say they've assembled more than 5,000 Russian government phone numbers, both landlines and cell phones, including members of the Russian military police, staff of its parliament, known as the Duma, and even Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB—all of which are now targets of its automated robo-dialing campaign.</p> <p>WasteRussianTime.today is designed to work by starting a VoIP call, automatically dialing 40 of the leaked phone numbers, and merging the user into a three-way call with the first two Russian officials' phones that connect. The site's creators say they decided not to let visitors to the site actually speak on the calls, for fear that they might say something that could identify and endanger themselves. So instead, the site functions as a kind of performance art installation, allowing visitors to silently observe and enjoy its spam calls. "Join the civil intervention against war," a message on the site reads. "If you're on the phone, you can't drop bombs or coordinate soldiers."</p>

In WIRED's dozen or so test calls on the site just before its launch, it still seemed to be ironing out some issues. It only worked on desktop, and many of the calls resulted in at least one voicemail message, with silence on one end of the line, or two voicemail messages speaking to each other. In about half the calls, at least one confused Russian-speaking person did pick up. But in only one call did two people pick up the phone, and due to a delay one hung up before the other started speaking. Shera said the developers were looking into a possible latency issue.

The site's creators say the idea for WasteRussianTime.today came about 24 hours after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in late February. As the hacktivist group discussed ways of protesting or disrupting the war, their brainstorming eventually turned to how they might be able to create a site that used leaked Russian phone numbers to allow visitors to call ordinary Russian citizens and speak to them about the invasion. But as more Russian government numbers leaked in the post-invasion hacking wave—and as they realized most visitors wouldn't be able to speak Russian, and the calls might create safety concerns—they instead pivoted to making Russian officials essentially prank call each other, with the site's visitors as the audience.

Bringing that idea to fruition took nearly three months, in part, the site's creators say, because they were designing it to be resilient against the inevitable response from the site's targets. They've prepared a broad range of numbers to call from, to make their calls more difficult to block or ignore. And they've engaged a service that offers defense against distributed denial of service attacks that might otherwise be used to knock their site offline with bombardments of junk traffic. (They declined to name the service.) “We think the whole system will not live forever; someday, it will get blocked probably,” says Shera, suggesting that the site may manage to stay online and functional for anywhere from hours to weeks.

WasteRussianTime.today's creators say they took care to screen the numbers they included to make sure they're all government or military staff, rather than random Russian civilians. For the cell phone numbers they're including, for instance, they're only using numbers leaked in recent months, since cell phone numbers are often recycled from one user to the next. But they also admit they didn't do much actual testing of the numbers for fear of alerting their targets to the project too early, which would lead to their calls being blocked. In a message posted online, they called on Russians to share any more government or military phone numbers they may have, but ask that those supplying them share verification where possible so they can avoid harassing civilians. “We're doing our best not to call some random grandma in Siberia,” Shera says.

The hacktivists say their idea was partly inspired by journalists at [Bellingcat and Russian news site The Insider who have called Russian officials and even intelligence agents](#), pretending to be their colleagues or superiors, to trick them into revealing sensitive information. That technique was most famously used by Alexei Navalny, working with Bellingcat, when he dialed up an FSB agent and [duped him into confessing to trying to assassinate him](#) with the Novichok nerve agent in a nearly hour-long phone call.

But Christo Grozev, the Bulgarian Bellingcat researcher and journalist who helped Navalny spoof that FSB call, points out that the WasteRussianTime.today project does come at a cost. “Whenever something like this becomes public, the whole department changes their numbers, and that's not good for investigations, including journalistic investigations,” says Grozev.

All the same, Grozev says he does appreciate the prankster spirit in which the project was conceived, and he says that it may discourage and demotivate Russian government staffers who feel their private information isn't being protected. “It's a great psychological operation,” he says. “It's just more of a radio morning show prank, rather than a journalistic operation.”

The site's cocreator, Shera, for his part, says that many of the numbers are already leaked and public to varying degrees. But more broadly, if the effect of the project is little more than a prank, so be it. “We just want to do our part and annoy the Russian military-industrial complex,” he says. “And make people laugh a bit.”

HEADLINE	05/18 Hacker can unlock, start Tesla cars
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/hacker-can-unlock-tesla-models-start-cars/
GIST	<p>Bloomberg - Tesla customers might love the carmakers' nifty keyless entry system, but one cybersecurity researcher has demonstrated how the same technology could allow thieves to drive off with certain models of the electric vehicles.</p> <p>A hack effective on the Tesla Model 3 and Y cars would allow a thief to unlock a vehicle, start it and speed away, according to Sultan Qasim Khan, principal security consultant at the Manchester, U.K.-based security firm NCC Group. By redirecting communications between a car owner's mobile phone or key fob, and the car, outsiders can fool the entry system into thinking the owner is located physically near the vehicle.</p> <p>"An attacker could walk up to any home at night — if the owner's phone is at home — with a Bluetooth passive entry car parked outside and use this attack to unlock and start the car," he said.</p> <p>"Once the device is in place near the fob or phone, the attacker can send commands from anywhere in the world," Khan added.</p> <p>The hack, Khan said, isn't specific to Tesla, though he demonstrated the technique to Bloomberg News on one of its car models. Rather, it's the result of his tinkering with Tesla's keyless entry system, which relies on what's known as a Bluetooth Low Energy protocol.</p> <p>There's no evidence that thieves have used the hack to improperly access Tesla vehicles. The carmaker didn't respond to a request for comment. NCC provided details of its findings to its clients in a note on Sunday, an official there said.</p> <p>Tesla in April acknowledged that relay attacks are a "known limitation of the passive entry system," according to NCC Group.</p> <p>Khan said he had disclosed the potential for attack to Tesla and that company officials didn't deem the issue a significant risk. To fix it, the carmaker would need to alter its hardware and change its keyless entry system, Khan said. The revelation comes after another security researcher, David Colombo, revealed a way of hijacking some functions on Tesla vehicles, such as opening and closing doors and controlling music volume.</p> <p>BLE protocol was designed to conveniently link devices together over the internet, though it's also emerged as a method that hackers exploit to unlock smart technologies including house locks, cars, phones and laptops, Khan said. NCC Group said it was able to conduct the attack on several other carmakers and technology companies' devices.</p> <p>Kwikset's Kevo smart locks that use keyless systems with iPhone or Android phones are impacted by the same issue, Khan said. Kwikset said that customers who use an iPhone to access the lock can switch on two-factor authentication in lock app. A spokesperson also added that the iPhone-operated locks have a 30-second timeout, helping protect against intrusion.</p> <p>Kwikset will be updating its Android app in "summer," the company said.</p> <p>"The security of Kwikset's products is of utmost importance and we partner with well-known security companies to evaluate our products and continue to work with them to ensure we are delivering the highest security possible for our consumers," a spokesperson said.</p> <p>A representative at Bluetooth SIG, the collective of companies that manages the technology said: "The Bluetooth Special Interest Group prioritizes security and the specifications include a collection of features that provide product developers the tools they need to secure communications between Bluetooth devices.</p>

	<p>“The SIG also provides educational resources to the developer community to help them implement the appropriate level of security within their Bluetooth products, as well as a vulnerability response program that works with the security research community to address vulnerabilities identified within Bluetooth specifications in a responsible manner.”</p> <p>Khan has identified numerous vulnerabilities in NCC Group client products and is also the creator of Sniffle, the first open-source Bluetooth 5 sniffer. Sniffers can be used to track Bluetooth signals, helping identify devices. They are often used by government agencies that manage roadways to anonymously monitor drivers passing through urban areas.</p> <p>A 2019 study by a British consumer group, Which, found that more than 200 car models were susceptible to keyless theft, using similar but slightly different attack methods such as spoofing wireless or radio signals.</p> <p>In a demonstration to Bloomberg News, Khan conducted a so-called relay attack, in which a hacker uses two small hardware devices that forward communications. To unlock the car, Khan placed one relay device within roughly 15 yards of the Tesla owner’s smartphone or key fob and a second, plugged into his laptop, near the car. The technology utilized custom computer code that Khan had designed for Bluetooth development kits, which are sold online for less than \$50.</p> <p>The hardware needed, in addition to Khan’s custom software, costs roughly \$100 altogether and can be easily bought online. Once the relays are set up, the hack takes just “10 seconds,” Khan said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Buffalo shooting; criticism tech platforms
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/buffalo-shooters-livestream-sparks-criticism-tech-platforms-content/story?id=84759735
GIST	<p>The 18-year-old suspect who allegedly gunned down 10 people in a mass shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, on Saturday had, authorities say, an assault-style rifle, body armor, a tactical helmet -- and a small camera.</p> <p>The horror that followed became the latest mass shooting simultaneously broadcast online. Twitch, the Amazon-owned platform on which the video appeared, said it took down the broadcast after less than two minutes.</p> <p>But that duration gave enough time for individuals to download and repost copies of the video, one of which was viewed more than 3 million times, after a link to the video on Facebook garnered more than 500 comments and 46,000 shares before its removal, the Washington Post reported.</p> <p>Plus, a 180-page document believed to have been published by the alleged shooter that included a litany of bigoted views said the writer had seen hateful messages on 4chan and other sites known for the appearance of white supremacist content, raising the possibility that he had been radicalized online. An additional 589-page document believed to be tied to the alleged shooter included postings by the alleged shooter on Discord, a social media platform.</p> <p>The suspected shooter is now facing murder charges to which he entered a not guilty plea.</p> <p>The episode drew renewed criticism of tech platforms and urgent calls for scrutiny over the moderation of videos and messages posted online, which can quickly spread to a wide audience and possibly fuel copycat attacks. The uproar arrives at a moment of public reckoning over content moderation, as Tesla CEO Elon Musk has used his \$44 billion bid for Twitter to voice his skepticism of platforms taking a broad role in removing posts.</p> <p>House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told ABC News' "This Week" on Sunday that social media companies must balance free speech with concerns over public safety. During the same show, New York Gov. Kathy</p>

Hochul criticized how hateful ideas spread on social media "like a virus" and called for accountability from the CEOs of social media companies.

Experts in online extremism told ABC News they hope the mass shooting on Saturday serves as a wake-up call to bolster the push for more rigorous moderation of online posts. But livestreams pose a particularly difficult task for those who police content on tech platforms, experts told ABC News, noting the challenge of monitoring and removing the posts in real time.

Further, online message boards that foment bigotry, such as 4chan, traffic in odious ideas that often stop short of violating the law, leaving the door open to such platforms with a more lax approach to monitoring content, Jared Holt, a resident fellow at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, told ABC News.

The mass shooting in Buffalo, which saw 10 people killed -- all of whom were Black -- and three others injured, comes three years after a self-identified white supremacist livestreamed a mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, which resulted in 51 people dead. Live video on Facebook of that massacre remained online for 17 minutes, far longer than the less than two minutes it took Twitch to take down the video from Buffalo on Saturday.

"It's an improvement, but needless to say, obviously it's not a perfect answer," Holt told ABC News. "Moderating live content has proven to be a massive challenge to tech platforms."

In general, tech platforms police content through both automated systems and manual decisions made by individuals, Alice Marwick, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who specializes in the study of social media, told ABC News. Livestreams pose such difficulty because they can evade the automated systems, forcing platforms to rely on human moderators who sometimes cannot handle the overwhelming volume of incoming content, she said.

"The size and scale of the number of livestreams that there are on a daily basis make it impossible to moderate them completely," she said.

More than 8 million users broadcast live on Twitch each month, and the site features an average of more than 2.5 million hours of video every day, Twitch Global Head of Trust and Safety Angela Hession told ABC News in a statement.

"We've invested heavily in our sitewide safety operations and in the people and technologies who drive them, and will continue to do so," she said.

Platforms could further limit livestream incidents like what happened in Buffalo by implementing a time-delay for live footage, like television stations do, Marwick and Holt said. The companies could also ensure that users must be verified before gaining the ability to livestream, as YouTube does.

But livestreaming will not be removed from the platforms altogether, Holt said, citing companies like Twitch that depend on livestreaming for their business. "The cat is out of the proverbial bag," he said.

Even a brief livestream can end up reaching a large audience. As noted, in the case of the video of the shooting in Buffalo, a copy of the livestreamed video received millions of views after a link on Facebook helped drive traffic to it, the Washington Post reported.

A spokesperson for Meta, the parent company of Facebook, told ABC News that the company on Saturday quickly designated the event as a "violating terrorist attack," which prompted an internal process to identify and remove the account of the identified suspect, as well as copies of his alleged document and any copy of or link to video of his alleged attack.

The move ensures that any copies of or links to the video, writing or other content that praises, supports or represents the suspect will be removed, the spokesperson added.

In a statement, Twitch told ABC News: "We are devastated to hear about the shooting that took place in Buffalo, New York. Our hearts go out to the community impacted by this tragedy. Twitch has a zero-tolerance policy against violence of any kind and works swiftly to respond to all incidents."

"The user has been indefinitely suspended from our service, and we are taking all appropriate action, including monitoring for any accounts rebroadcasting this content," the statement added.

Content monitors also face a challenge from message boards and other sites that feature white supremacist ideology and can radicalize users. Since such content is offensive and dangerous but oftentimes legal, the onus falls on platforms to take an aggressive approach to remove it, Holt told ABC News. Not all platforms bring the same level of rigor to the task, he added.

The anonymous imageboard website 4chan is known for the appearance of hateful content. The alleged shooter in Buffalo named 4chan as a site he had visited. The website has not responded to ABC News' request for comment.

Hateful content can migrate from alternative platforms to more mainstream ones, allowing such messages to reach a wider audience before they are addressed, Holt said.

"There may be awful things on seedier internet platforms like 4chan," he said. "The internet doesn't exist as perfectly siloed platforms."

The alleged shooter also posted messages online in a private group on Discord, a social media platform. It's unclear who had access to the group. According to ABC News consultant and former Department of Homeland Security official John Cohen, Discord is a popular platform mostly with high school-aged teenagers and has been used to spread conspiracy theories.

"We extend our deepest sympathies to the victims and their families. Hate and violence have no place on Discord. We are doing everything we can to assist law enforcement in the investigation," a spokesperson for Discord told ABC News in a statement.

Online radicalization takes place over a prolonged period, affording multiple opportunities for platforms to step in, said Marwick, the professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"When people do get radicalized online, it's not something that happens in an instant," she said. "Sometimes people like to think about this as a flash of lightning -- that's not how this works"

"It takes place over a period of time," she adds. "There are possible points of intervention before it gets to this point."

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/18 Top Taliban leader makes more promises
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/18/asia/amanpour-haqqani-taliban-women-interview-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Kabul (CNN)A senior Taliban official has repeated the group's as-yet-unfulfilled pledge to allow girls back into high school, saying there would be "good news soon," but suggested that women who protested the regime's restrictions on women rights should stay home.</p> <p>Sirajuddin Haqqani, Afghanistan's acting interior minister and the Taliban's co-deputy leader since 2016, made the comments in an exclusive, first on-camera interview showing his face with CNN's Christiane Amanpour in Kabul.</p>

In March after many promises that girls would be able to attend secondary school, the Taliban reversed their decision, postponing the return indefinitely.

When asked about Afghan women who say they are afraid to leave their homes under Taliban rule, and those who have reported a chilling effect of the militant group's leadership, Haqqani added with a laugh: "We keep naughty women at home."

After being pressed to clarify his comment by Amanpour, he said: "By saying naughty women, it was a joke referring to those naughty women who are controlled by some other sides to bring the current government into question."

Haqqani also set out some parameters for the future of women and work, which will be limited by the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and "national, cultural and traditional principles."

"They are allowed to work within their own framework," he told Amanpour.

The Taliban minister was speaking in his first on-camera interview with a Western media outlet in years, just months after showing his face in public for the first time. The high-ranking and intensely secretive official is wanted by the FBI and has been classified by the US State Department as a "specially designated global terrorist." He has a \$10 million bounty on his head.

His comments on girls' education and the rights of women punctuated a series of claims that "there is no one opposed to (girls') education" in the Afghan government.

"Already girls are allowed to go to school up to grade 6, and above that grade, the work is continuing on a mechanism," Haqqani said. "Very soon, you will hear very good news about this issue, God willing," he added, without specifying a timeframe.

Afterwards, Haqqani's aides said the interview was an effort to open a new chapter in relations with the US and the world.

But the Taliban have repeatedly made assurances to the international community that it will protect the rights of women and girls since seizing Afghanistan last August, while simultaneously stripping away many of their freedoms and protections.

Many school-age girls and women have already lost hope. "Their entire government [is] against girls' education," 19-year-old Maryam told CNN on Tuesday. "I don't believe that the Taliban fulfil their promises ... they don't understand our feelings."

"Step by step they are taking all our freedoms," added Fatima, 17. "The Taliban now and the Taliban of the 90s are the same — I don't see any change on their policy and rules.

"Our only hope is the international community brings extreme pressure on the Taliban to allow girls to go to school. Nothing else [will] work."

Maryam and Fatima, like the other women CNN spoke to, did not provide their last names due to concerns about their security.

Haqqani's comments will likely do little to encourage observers that the Taliban are serious about their commitments. "Everyone from the Taliban leadership has zero credibility on this issue," Heather Barr, associate director of the Women's Rights Division at international watchdog Human Rights Watch, told CNN.

"They have made representations about their supposed respect for women and girls," since taking power, Barr added. "Every day after that there was a new crackdown on women, and that's continued to intensify over time."

The G7 foreign ministers and the High Representative of the European Union last week expressed their "strongest opposition" against the growing restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women's and girls' rights. Haqqani told CNN the international community's "judgements, research, and decision making are all one-sided," adding: "We are still at the preliminary phase. It has barely been eight months since we took over the government ... we are yet to bring the situation back to normal."

After taking power, the Taliban have [warned women to stay home](#) and their fighters have [used whips and sticks](#) against those protesting. In the subsequent months, they have been banned from large swathes of public life -- from [appearing on television](#) to taking [long road trips alone](#). A new decree earlier this month said women [must cover their faces in public](#).

When pressed by Amanpour on whether all women have to cover their faces, Haqqani responded: "We are not forcing women to wear [the] hijab, but we are advising them and preaching to them from time to time ... [the] hijab is not compulsory but it is an Islamic order that everyone should implement."

On the streets of Kabul, the growing isolation of women from society has left many in economic peril. "I have to work," a woman named Khotima told CNN. "They should let us work because we have to become the men of the family so we can find bread for the children."

"When you don't have money, when you don't have [a] job, you don't have income, would you be able to eat proper food when there is no work?" added another woman named Farishta.

US not 'currently' enemy, Haqqani says

Haqqani was speaking with CNN two months after the Taliban released rare photographs of the minister at a ceremony for police officers. Prior to that, he had rarely been seen in public; his FBI "Most Wanted" poster features only a grainy picture showing part of his face.

He is wanted by the agency for questioning in connection with a 2008 attack on a hotel in Kabul that killed six people including a US citizen; the [US government](#) says Haqqani admitted to planning the attack in a previous media interview. He is part of the family that forms the Haqqani network, the Islamist militant organization founded by his father Jalaluddin Haqqani, which was designated as a terrorist group by the United States in 2012.

Haqqani told CNN that "In the future, we would like to have good relations with the United States and the international community," adding: "currently we do not look at them as enemies."

But he made repeated assurances about women's rights and education for girls that were at odds with the observations of global watchdogs and governments.

"The international community is raising the issue of women's rights a lot. Here in Afghanistan, there are Islamic, national, cultural, and traditional principles," he said. "Within the limits of those principles, we are working to provide them with opportunities to work and that is our goal."

The Taliban released a so-called "decree on women's rights" in December that failed to mention access to education or work and was [immediately criticized by Afghan women and experts](#), who said it was proof that the militant group was uninterested in upholding basic freedoms for millions of women.

Afghan girls above grade 6 were due to go back to school in March for the first time since the Taliban's takeover, but were told to stay home until an appropriate school uniform according to Sharia and Afghan customs and culture is designed, the Taliban-run Bakhtar News Agency reported at the time.

Haqqani told CNN the delay was necessary while leaders design the "mechanism" through which girls can return to education. "There were some shortcomings within the preparations that were ongoing. Work is ongoing on those issues," he said.

But experts expressed skepticism that their motives are different than was the case between 1996 and 2001, when the first Taliban regime barred girls from studying.

"They always said the conditions aren't right now, [but they would] figure it out," Barr said. "In those five years, that moment never came. So very clearly to women and girls, that was always a lie, and that's how it feels this time as well."

Haqqani was also questioned on the status of Mark Frerichs, a US veteran and contractor who was kidnapped in Kabul in late January 2020 and is believed to be held by the Haqqani network.

A proof of life video, apparently filmed in November 2021, emerged in April, in which Frerichs said: "I'd like to ask the leadership of the Islamic Emirate of fghanistan, please, release me. Release me so that I may be reunited with my family."

Haqqani told CNN: "That is what they think, that he is with us ... There is no obstacle from the Emirate side for his release. If the United States accepts the Islamic Emirate's conditions, the issue of his release could be solved in a day.

"About the assumptions that he might be with us, I want to say that we are part of the Islamic Emirate, we are committed to obey the orders of Amirul Momineen, the Supreme Leader," he added. "Efforts are ongoing at the government level, and a team is designated for negotiations with them."

When reached for comment, a US State Department spokesperson told CNN: "The safe and immediate release of US citizen and Navy veteran Mark Frerichs is imperative. We have made that clear to the Taliban and called on them to release him immediately in practically every conversation over the past two years."

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HEADLINE	05/19 Canada: lone extremists difficult to detect
SOURCE	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/terrorism-detection-csis-1.6456139?cmp=rss
GIST	<p>Violent extremists in Canada have the "intent and capability" to commit acts of terrorism, but detecting attacks by lone actors or small groups before they happen is "difficult," says an internal threat assessment conducted for the federal government last year.</p> <p>The warning is found in a threat analysis prepared by the federal government's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (ITAC) in the lead-up to last year's muted Canada Day celebrations.</p> <p>At the time, the team — which works with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to advise the federal government on terrorist threats — was worried that ideologically or religiously motivated extremists could seize the occasion of the national holiday to make a violent statement.</p> <p>While no known attacks happened last July 1, the analysis shines a light on the things the secretive agency looks for in advance of special events and the challenges it faces detecting would-be attackers.</p> <p>"An attack on a Canada Day 2021 celebration or legitimate public protest is most likely to be conducted by an inspired lone actor or small group using unsophisticated methods such as firearms, bladed weapons, vehicles or homemade explosives," ITAC concluded in its report, obtained by CBC News through an access to information request.</p> <p>"Such attacks require little planning and are difficult to detect."</p> <p>Jessica Davis is a former senior intelligence analyst with CSIS who now heads the consulting firm Insight Threat Intelligence. She said lone extremists can stay "completely off the radar" until it's too late.</p>

"Lots of people are radicalized. Lots of people hold extremist views. Only a very small minority actually take action on them," she said.

"So the challenge is really figuring out who in that big bucket is actually going to do something."

Barbara Perry is the director of the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism at Ontario Tech University. She said that while her team has identified about 300 right-wing hate groups in Canada, identifying those who pose a threat without necessarily belonging to any of those groups is nearly impossible.

"Many of these actors don't necessarily themselves engage. They're consuming but they're not producing necessarily online, so you're not going to see those red flags on their social media," she said.

"I don't think anyone has identified a sort of effective profile of who these folks are."

CSIS watches for flags — like maxed-out credit cards

Back in 2018, CSIS launched a study of what spurs someone to engage in terrorist activity.

According to the agency's analysis, a radicalized person's journey from "mobilization" to violence — from intent to action — takes on average about 12 months.

That report concluded that CSIS analysts can't detect the next terrorist by looking at characteristics such as age, gender or socio-economic background. It said its analysts focus instead on indicators like an individual changing their physical training routine, maxing-out a credit card or putting personal belongings up for sale.

The growing concern about ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE) — a broad term used by CSIS to cover extremism based on various grievances, including those expressed by far-right, anti-government and racist groups — weighed heavily on the pre-Canada Day assessment.

In-person Canada Day celebrations on Parliament Hill were cancelled last year due to the pandemic. As ITAC was putting together its analysis, some provinces and regions had started easing their pandemic restrictions and were hosting events.

Based out of the CSIS headquarters in Ottawa, ITAC is made up of officials from departments and agencies tasked with security and intelligence. ITAC produces its reports for senior decision-makers based on classified and open-source information.

"Despite continued limitations, opportunities will exist for terrorist actors to cause mass casualties or conduct symbolic attacks on Canada Day," says ITAC's summer 2021 assessment.

"Violent extremists in Canada have the intent and capability to conduct a domestic act of terrorism." The analysis goes on to say that "crowded areas, symbols of government and security personnel could be targeted specifically."

The ITAC team said would-be attackers who are unable to access their intended targets due to things like security barriers likely would adjust by "redirecting their terrorist intent to a more easily accessible target," such as bystanders, less secure gatherings and symbolic people or places.

Canada's counterterrorism tools can't cope: former analyst

Davis said Canada's security apparatus struggles to detect lone actors in part because many of its counterterrorism tools were set up to detect terrorist cells or organizations.

"So we haven't fully adapted, I would say, to the lone actor environment," she said.

Perry calls it the "atomization of the movement ... where you do have more and more individuals who were drawn to the narratives, drawn to those online spaces and don't necessarily affiliate with a particular group.

"We talked about them cherry-picking little bits and pieces that seemed to suit their needs or their individual situations," she said. "How do you count them? We haven't."

Davis said Canada could bring up its counterterrorism game by boosting the resources it devotes to it at a time when both CSIS and the RCMP are struggling with recruitment and retention.

"If you just don't have the people to run the investigations and the resources assigned to support those investigations in terms of analysis, there's going to be a lot of things that you miss," she said, adding that Ottawa should be ensuring the security sector has "the right tools, techniques, technologies" and "authorizations" to do the job.

Perry said Canadians also need to be educated on the signs of radicalization.

"One of the things I keep thinking about is building capacity more broadly in terms of caregivers and educators — and even youth, who probably spend more time than parents do with other youth — in terms of how can we help them to identify red flags, like certain changes in ... the kind of language people use," she said.

As an example of an assault by a lone actor, the ITAC analysis cited the June 2021 vehicular attack in London, Ont. that claimed the lives of four members of a Muslim family.

On June 6, 2021, the Afzaal family was struck by a truck on Hyde Park Road in what police described as a crime motivated by anti-Muslim hate.

Salman Afzaal, 46, his 44-year-old wife Madiha Salman, their 15-year-old daughter Yumna and her 74-year-old grandmother, Talat Afzaal, were killed while out for an evening walk. The couple's young son was seriously hurt.

Nathaniel Veltman, 21, faces four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder.

That event "demonstrates how the confluence of ideological beliefs, personal grievances and possible triggers can mobilize threat actors to violence," wrote ITAC.

While the report was compiled last spring, the Canadian agency's warnings were brought into sharper focus by Saturday's devastating mass shooting in Buffalo, N.Y. which left 10 people dead at a supermarket.

U.S. officials say the 18-year-old alleged shooter had repeatedly visited websites espousing white supremacist ideologies and race-based conspiracy theories.

Davis said media reports on the alleged shooter indicate a number of points where authorities could have anticipated and prevented the attack.

"There was also a series of financial purchases that he made, particularly weapons and gear and components for his attack, that had he been the subject of investigation would have been able to allow investigators to see sort of an escalation in behaviour and escalation in his mobilization of violence," she said.

"The challenge in the United States, of course, is that things like a weapons purchase isn't really a useful indicator because it's such a pervasive activity."

21 killed on Canadian soil by extremists: CSIS

	<p>According to CSIS's latest annual report, tabled in Parliament earlier this month, lone actors remain the primary IMVE threat.</p> <p>"Since 2014, Canadians motivated in whole or in part by their extremist ideological views have killed 21 people and wounded 40 others on Canadian soil," said that annual report.</p> <p>Asked whether CSIS has any concerns about this year's Canada Day's celebrations, agency spokesperson Brandon Champagne said it can't "publicly comment, or confirm or deny the specifics of our investigations, operational interests, methodologies or activities."</p> <p>"The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated xenophobic and anti-authority narratives, many of which may directly or indirectly impact national security considerations. Violent extremists continue to exploit the pandemic by amplifying false information about government measures and the virus itself on the Internet," he said.</p> <p>"It is important to note that the national terrorism threat level has remained unchanged, at MEDIUM, since October 2014."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 DHS violent extremism program effective?
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/buffalo-shooting-dhs-grants-extremism-rcna29253
GIST	<p>A Department of Homeland Security program that targets violent extremism is drawing fresh scrutiny after a shooting massacre in a largely Black neighborhood of Buffalo, New York, on Saturday.</p> <p>In the wake of the shootings, Department of Homeland Security officials have highlighted the work of the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program, which distributed \$20 million last year nationwide. The program funds efforts by law enforcement, university researchers and community groups to help identify people at risk of becoming radicalized by extremist beliefs and get them counseling and other support services.</p> <p>"It is the school teacher, the family, the neighbor, the faith leader. It is friends, it is people in the communities who can identify this conduct," Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a call this week with law enforcement officials, civil rights leaders and religious groups. "And we need to guide them effectively, to report it to law enforcement and to other authorities, so that we can intervene and do the best we can to prevent a tragedy such as that occurred this past Saturday in Buffalo, New York, from ever occurring."</p> <p>But critics question whether the grants are effective in preventing violence, and they say the program could violate people's civil rights by sweeping up some people who have no intention of hurting others, while missing people who pose a threat.</p> <p>"This program is useless and can only do harm," said Harsha Panduranga, counsel to the Liberty & National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan institute at New York University's School of Law. "Our standpoint would be just to get rid of it."</p> <p>The grant program, which began under President Barack Obama, has a rocky history, including accusations that it targeted Muslim Americans and minimized the threat from far-right extremists in later years, during the administration of President Donald Trump. Those failures have forced a rebranding of the program under President Joe Biden, who said he was motivated to run in part by a violent 2017 demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia, involving white supremacists.</p> <p>The Buffalo attack, in which 10 people were killed and three were injured, has revived talk about the grant program because there were warning signs about the accused shooter, who authorities said was a white supremacist fueled by hatred of Black people.</p>

The suspect, 18, is believed to be the author of a [180-page document](#) uploaded days before the attack that describes being radicalized on the extremist website 4chan and cited racist conspiracy theories. Last year, when the suspect was a high school student, he was taken to a hospital for a mental health evaluation after saying he wanted to commit a murder/suicide, but was not charged with a crime because the threat was not specific, authorities said.

In the days since the shooting, Department of Homeland Security officials have emphasized their efforts to combat domestic violent extremism, including the grant program. Under Biden, the program's activities are reviewed by the department's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

But civil liberties advocates say the program could alienate more people than it helps by unfairly labeling many troubled people as potential terrorists and referring them to law enforcement. That may make it more difficult to identify people who are actually planning an attack, Panduranga said.

The risk factors for radicalization [adopted by the Department of Homeland Security](#) include criminal history, mental health problems, unemployment, low level of education and "social alienation." Panduranga wrote [a 2021 report](#) that said the program would fail to prevent violence and risk violating people's rights of free speech, assembly and religion. Instead, he said, authorities should focus on people who have already shown warning signs, such as participants in violent far-right rallies or the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

"We have serious concerns about a model in which you can pick up on who is going to be the next terrorist and mass shooter by looking at behavioral indicators like feeling hopeless, having a grievance, having mental health issues, following a particular ideology," Panduranga said. "Given the breadth of warning signs it uses, we're worried that it can be a vehicle for biases."

The grant program, originally called Countering Violent Extremism, [began during the Obama administration](#) amid heightened concerns about attacks from ISIS, an Islamist terror group. Activists said the program unfairly targeted Muslim communities and questioned the methods used to identify people vulnerable to radicalization. Opponents said the program also did not pay sufficient attention to right-wing extremists, who, [according to the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), were responsible for 75 percent of the 443 extremist-related killings from 2012 to 2021.

That criticism deepened under Trump, when the Department of Homeland Security rescinded some Obama-era grants and focused even more on Muslims, immigrants and refugees, [according to the Brennan Center](#). The program, renamed Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention, shrunk in size and budget, and for three years stopped issuing grants.

But the Department of Homeland Security continued to endorse the program, [publishing a 2020 study](#) that found promising work by several recipients, including a Nebraska project that "increased the likelihood" of referrals to community-based support services, a Houston crisis intervention hotline that received 167 calls over two years, and a Denver Police Department program that trained hundreds of officers on recognizing signs of violent extremist threats. The report concluded that the early prevention efforts were relatively low cost, "successful and needed to be scaled across the country."

In fiscal year 2020 Congress restored \$10 million in grants. The following year, the amount doubled. Under Biden, the Department of Homeland Security renamed the office overseeing the grants as the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships. Compared with the original grant program, in which nearly half of the 25 recipients were law enforcement organizations, the rebranded program became more diverse, with law enforcement groups making up about a third of the 38 recipients. The list now includes groups [across a wider variety of fields](#), including the Boston Children's Hospital, the violence-interruption group Cure Violence and Life After Hate, which fights white supremacist ideology and whose original grant was rescinded under Trump.

The goal under Biden is to create a network of local service providers trained to notice when a person exhibits signs of violent extremism, provide that person with help — and, if needed, get police involved,

Homeland Security officials said. That approach is based on research about suicide prevention, drug abuse prevention and gang violence prevention, they said.

Samantha Vinograd, acting assistant secretary for counterterrorism and threat prevention at the Department of Homeland Security, said in an interview that the agency was committed to regaining the trust of communities that felt stigmatized by the earlier programs. But the department was also aware that the threat of terrorism and targeted violence is “incredibly diversified,” which makes the broader approach necessary.

“It’s about getting individuals the help they need at the earliest possible time,” Vinograd said. “We don’t want to wait until an individual is about to commit an act of violence to engage in violence prevention.”

Among the current grant recipients is Music in Common, which has people from different races collaborate on musical projects. After losing its 2016 grant, the group received \$400,000 last year, which it is using to conduct programs in six cities.

“We need more on-the-ground community projects like this. That’s how over time we will see an actual change in these violent behaviors,” said Todd Mack, the program’s executive director.

Mack said that the race-based hate in the Buffalo document is what his organization tries to extinguish. “If the shooter in Buffalo had been exposed to something like what we do, where a connection could have been made on a personal level with people they ‘hate,’ that might have changed the course of actions,” Mack said.

Ryan Greer, director of national security for the American Defamation League, said the current version of the grants program does the right thing by taking a public health approach to violent extremism. His organization wants to see the grants expanded to \$150 million a year.

But Greer acknowledged that there hasn’t been enough effort or money put into evaluating the programs’ effectiveness. A [2021 Government Accountability Office report](#) called for more data collection “to determine whether the grant programs are achieving their intended outcomes.”

Panduranga noted that some of the grant recipients — such as Music in Common — are worthwhile but should not be funded or overseen by the Department of Homeland Security under the label of countering terrorism. Instead, he said, they should be run by social service or education agencies.

“They should be funded by the people with the right expertise and not framed in a way that labels people as potential terror attackers,” Panduranga said.

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HEADLINE	05/18 War in Ukraine: will Islamic State benefit?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220518-ukraine-war-will-the-islamic-state-benefit
GIST	<p>In the middle of last month, the extremist group known as the “Islamic State” issued a threat. The group announced “a blessed campaign to take revenge” after their leader was killed in a US military raid in Syria in February.</p> <p>At the same time, the extremist group, which controlled around a third of Syria and Iraq at the height of its powers, also called on supporters to take advantage of opportunities presented by the war in Ukraine. While “infidel” Western nations were preoccupied, “Islamic State” supporters could attack, the message suggested.</p> <p>Meanwhile, a magazine openly supporting al-Qaeda — another similar extremist organization that the IS group distanced itself from in 2013 — proposed that its supporters somehow get hold of weapons being handed out to civilians in Ukraine, then use them against Europeans.</p>

As yet the idea of launching terrorist attacks while the West is distracted by Ukraine does not appear to have caught on [in Europe](#). The IS group has around a dozen affiliate groups in different regions, from Africa to Asia, and [most of the violence attributable](#) to it is currently [being perpetuated in Africa](#).

But there is another way that war in Ukraine might benefit IS, al-Qaeda and potentially even other extremist organizations, experts have said.

Exploiting Social Unrest

Extremists will try to exploit “a [new wave of social unrest](#) resulting from the high cost of living in societies severely affected by the [COVID-19] pandemic and then the repercussions of the crisis in Ukraine,” Ezzat Ibrahim Youssef, editor-in-chief of Egyptian weekly, *Al Ahram*, warned recently in a report for the Abu Dhabi think tank, [Trends Research](#).

During this month’s Morocco meeting of the international coalition to combat the IS group, the head of the 22-nation Arab League issued a similar alert. The consequences of the war and climate change could be exploited by groups like IS, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, a veteran Egyptian diplomat, cautioned.

Basically, the repercussions of the war in Europe are adding another layer of difficulty in countries with preexisting crises. [Grain shortages](#), rising petrol and food prices, inflation and the fact that some aid organizations are now more focused on Ukraine are among the extra problems that countries like Lebanon, [Syria](#), Tunisia, Libya and Yemen must deal with.

It is quite possible that, as the Ukraine war goes on, things will only get worse in countries already grappling with instability. This is where the so-called “Islamic State” group may benefit. Economic problems and political turmoil could mean that more locals in those countries see joining an extremist group like IS as a viable option.

No Job, No Social Standing

Back in 2015, Tunisians already made up the highest number of foreign fighters joining IS, then at the peak of its powers and attracting people from all around the world to join it.

According to global security consultancy Soufan Group, there were 6,000 Tunisians in the IS that year, compared with 2,500 Russians, 2,400 Saudi Arabians, 1,700 French and 760 Germans, among many other nationalities.

There are a wide range of reasons [why so many foreigners joined the “Islamic State”](#) back then. For instance, for many coming to Iraq and Syria from Europe, the marginalization of Muslims back home made the idea of an actual Islamic state attractive. But later, interviews with captured fighters from nearby countries suggested that money was also a significant factor.

“The issues in Tunisia that led so many young men to join IS were economic in nature,” explained Anne Speckhard, director of the US-based International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, or ICSVE, who has interviewed former IS fighters.

Many of the young Tunisian men had no money or jobs and were unable to marry or leave the family home while “the IS group was offering paid jobs, free housing and wives to marry as well as sex slaves,” Speckhard told DW.

Anger and Hopelessness

There’s already some indications that the IS is exploiting current economic issues in the Middle East in a similar way today. Recent reports from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli discussed how over 40 young men had “disappeared” earlier this year.

Families only found out where they were when they heard that some of the men had been killed at IS training camps in the Iraqi desert. Lebanon is dealing with a crippling economic crisis, and local officials told journalists the IS group offered pay of over \$500 (around €480) a month.

Similar stories have come from the IS group's anti-Taliban offshoot in Afghanistan, known as [ISIS-Khorasan](#), which is reported to be offering unemployed locals in low-income border districts between \$270 (€260) and \$450 (€430) a month to join.

"The IS group is still giving vulnerable people financial incentives to join," ICSVE director Speckhard argued. "While the terrorist call may not resonate with deeply impoverished people struggling for basic daily survival, those who have higher education, or food but not jobs, can be angered into joining terrorist groups that they come to believe will govern more justly."

Speckhard referred to the recent mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, where an American teenager killed 10 shoppers in a supermarket. "While white supremacists are not offering jobs, they are offering someone to blame for failures in life, including failures to make it economically," said the psychiatry professor.

The IS group uses similar tactics and in both situations, Speckhard said, "economic stressors can fuel recruitment."

Issues like unemployment and rising prices, alongside political issues and pandemic isolation, all "play into a feeling of despair and anger and wish to shift blame to some clear cause," said Speckhard.

A Long-Term Strategy

Political instability and power vacuums, which often arise thanks to economic problems, have also been exploited by the IS group in the past.

It will take some time to know whether extremists will benefit from the Ukraine war, added Charlie Winter, an expert on the IS group and research director at ExTrac in the United Kingdom, which uses artificial intelligence for security analysis.

"There may be some second- or third-order impacts further down the line because of the Ukraine war," he told DW. "But it's difficult to draw a direct link between that and the IS group's capabilities, or its ability to mobilize new supporters."

Winter, also an associate fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism based in the Netherlands, said when the COVID-19 health crisis began, the IS group made very similar comments, saying the pandemic would drain adversaries' resources, divert security spending and provide opportunities for extremists. But they saw this as a long-term plan, the expert explained.

"Things getting worse socially and economically or in terms of general security in places where the IS group already has established networks could serve its purposes," Winter cautioned.

But a number of things would prevent things going much beyond that. For one thing, [the IS group is far smaller now](#), has fewer resources and fighters. For another, it doesn't have a territorial "caliphate" (a major draw in the past) anymore, and ground it does hold in Africa is far harder to get to, Winter said.

Additionally, the IS group "has shown its true un-Islamic and corrupt nature to many who would no longer be fooled," Speckhard noted.

"Worst case scenario is that this [the Ukraine war] possibly makes a few more people more inclined to become adherents," Winter concluded. "But I think we'd be very, very unlikely to see a mobilization on anything like the scale that we saw in bygone years."

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HEADLINE	05/17 Taliban to loosen restrictions on AQ?
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-poised-to-loosen-restrictions-on-al-qaida-/6577618.html
GIST	WASHINGTON — Recent assessments by U.S. military officials are raising questions about Afghanistan's Taliban rulers and what they are willing to do to keep the al-Qaida terror group in check.

As part of the February 2020 Doha Agreement with the United States that paved the way for the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban agreed to make sure Afghanistan would never again be used as a launchpad for terror attacks against the West.

But the assessments by U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. military forces in the Middle East and South Asia, and shared with the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General indicate that while that pledge is holding for now, the Taliban may be ready to consider a change.

"The Taliban will likely loosen these restrictions over the next 12 to 24 months, allowing al-Qaida greater freedom of movement and the ability to train, travel, and potentially re-establish an external operations capability," according to an inspector general report released Tuesday.

CENTCOM's assessment does not explain why the Taliban appear willing to let al-Qaida operate more freely, though the inspector general report points to military intelligence estimates that note both al-Qaida and its regional affiliate, al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), certainly aspire to attack the U.S. and U.S. targets.

However, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency has also said that al-Qaida's progress has been stunted despite the lack of a U.S. counterterrorism presence in Afghanistan.

"Al-Qaida has had some problems with reconstitution, leadership and, to a degree, I think the Taliban have held to their word about not allowing al-Qaida to rejuvenate," DIA Director Lieutenant General Scott Berrier told lawmakers in Washington on May 10.

"It's something that we watch very, very carefully," he said, adding that it would likely take more than a year for al-Qaida to be able to launch or direct attacks against the U.S.

Recent intelligence estimates from the United States and from other countries put the number of al-Qaida followers in Afghanistan at several hundred, including al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

A United Nations report issued this past February, however, cautioned that, "some of its [al-Qaida's] closest sympathizers within the Taliban now occupy senior positions in the new de facto Afghan administration."

Intelligence shared by U.N. member states indicates AQIS has up to 400 fighters in Afghanistan spread across at least six provinces, though the recent U.S. assessments put the number at about half that.

Taliban officials rarely speak publicly about al-Qaida, likely given the close relationship between the two groups. However, U.S. military and diplomatic officials have said that, at least until now, the Taliban have taken steps to make good on their counterterrorism commitments.

Taliban officials have been willing to publicly discuss the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, also known as IS-Khorasan Province or ISIS-K. And in a statement Tuesday, Taliban Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi assured the U.N. Mission in Afghanistan that that IS-Khorasan has been eradicated.

Islamic State

U.S. military and intelligence officials, though, caution that contrary to the Taliban's assertions, IS-Khorasan may be poised to expand its operations in Afghanistan and beyond.

DIA officials told the Pentagon Inspector General that IS-Khorasan likely has about 2,000 fighters across Afghanistan and that the group could direct an attack in the West within the next year if the terror group so chooses.

The DIA also warned IS-Khorasan has increased its efforts to recruit inside Afghanistan and that it had made a concerted effort to recruit from Afghanistan's neighbors.

"Since January ISIS-K has been publishing media in Central Asian languages to reach ethnic minorities in the region," the report said. "[It] aims to inspire supporters in these regions to travel to Afghanistan or conduct attacks where they are located, potentially against Western personnel and interests."

Western intelligence and humanitarian officials warned VOA last year that IS-Khorasan was busy laying the groundwork to expand its reach into Central Asia.

"They are building local infrastructure for the recruitment, logistics, economic support, economic infrastructure to support that," one humanitarian official who asked not to be named for fear they might be target, told VOA last July.

The focus was on "more quality and less numbers," the official said.

No counterterror strikes

The U.S. has not conducted any counterterrorism strikes in Afghanistan since the last U.S. forces left the country last year, with the Pentagon saying on Tuesday airstrikes have not yet been necessary.

"We haven't felt the need to do that," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby told reporters.

"We're not just sitting idly by," he added. "We're working continually on making sure we have strong over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities."

Kirby also said the Pentagon is watching the situation with the Taliban and al-Qaida as closely as it can.

"We've long said that we're going to judge the Taliban by what they do, not what they say," Kirby said in response to a question from VOA. "Nobody wants to see al-Qaida regain any kind of tangible footprint in Afghanistan or any ability to plan or attack outside the region."

According to the Defense Department Inspector General report, Pentagon financial officials estimate the U.S. will spend about \$19.5 billion in fiscal 2022 to support its counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan out of a headquarters in Doha.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Pakistan's tougher line on Afghan Taliban
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/militant-attacks-hurt-pakistan-relations-afghan-taliban-84826385
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD -- Faced with rising violence, Pakistan is taking a tougher line to pressure Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to crack down on militants hiding on their soil, but so far the Taliban remain reluctant to take action — trying instead to broker a peace.</p> <p>Last month came a sharp deterioration in relations between the two neighbors when Pakistan carried out airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan. Witnesses said the strikes hit a refugee camp and another location, killing at least 40 civilians. UNICEF said 20 children were believed to be among the dead.</p> <p>Pakistan never confirmed the April 17 strikes, but two days later its Foreign Ministry issued a sharp warning to the Taliban not to shelter militants.</p> <p>The pressure has put the Taliban in a tight corner. The Taliban have long been close to several militant groups carrying out attacks in Pakistan, particularly the Pakistani Taliban, a separate organization known by the acronym TTP. The TTP and other groups have only got more active on Afghan soil since the Taliban takeover in August.</p>

But the Taliban are wary of cracking down on them, fearful of creating more enemies at a time when they already face an increasingly violent campaign by Afghanistan's Islamic State group affiliate, analysts say.

A series of bombings across Afghanistan in recent weeks, mostly targeting minority Hazaras, has killed dozens. Most are blamed on the Islamic State affiliate, known by the acronym IS-K. The bloodshed has undermined the Taliban's claims to be able to provide the security expected of a governing force.

This week, the Taliban hosted talks between the TTP and a Pakistani government delegation as well as a group of Pakistani tribal leaders, apparently hoping for a compromise that can ease the pressure. On Wednesday, the TTP announced it was extending to May 30 an earlier cease-fire it had called.

The Taliban government's deputy spokesman Bilal Karimi said it "is trying its best for the continuation and success of the negotiations and meanwhile asks both sides to have flexibility."

But past cease-fires with the TTP have failed, and already the current one was shaken by violence last weekend.

Pakistan's frustration appears to be growing as violence on its soil has increased.

The secessionist Baluchistan Liberation Army killed three Chinese nationals in late April. The TTP and the Afghan-based IS have targeted Pakistan's military with increasing regularity.

Militant attacks in Pakistan are up nearly 50% since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, according to the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, an independent think tank based in Islamabad that tracks militant activities. The group documented 170 attacks between September and mid-May that killed 170 police, military and paramilitary personnel and more than 110 civilians.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 10,000 TTP militants are hiding in Afghanistan. So far, Afghanistan's rulers have done little to dismantle militant redoubts on their territory.

Prominent Afghans from southern Afghanistan, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said the Pakistani Taliban and Pakistani Baluch secessionists had established several safe houses in the area during the previous U.S.-backed government's rule and they have remained since the Taliban takeover.

The Pakistani airstrikes in April marked a dramatically tougher stance. They came after a militant ambush killed seven soldiers near the border with Afghanistan. Pakistani and Afghani border forces often exchange rocket fire amid disputes over the frontier — but it is rare for Pakistan to use warplanes on targets inside its neighbor.

The change came after weeks of political turmoil in Pakistan that unseated Imran Khan as prime minister. Khan had been an advocate of negotiations with militants and had campaigned for the world to engage with the Taliban after their takeover in Afghanistan.

Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center said Khan "had a soft spot for the Taliban as well as a principled opposition to the use of force in Afghanistan."

With Khan now out of the picture and TTP attacks continuing, "we can expect a stronger Pakistani readiness to use military operations," he said.

The Afghan Taliban are warning Pakistan against further military action, threatening retaliation.

The airstrikes "are not acceptable," Taliban-appointed Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqoob warned Pakistan in late April. "The only reason we have tolerated this attack is because of our national interest, but it is possible we will not be so tolerant in the future."

	<p>The son of the Taliban founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Yaqoob is a powerful figure in the Taliban leadership, which is struggling to stay united amid disagreements about how to govern their war-ravaged nation.</p> <p>The leadership council seems firmly split between two camps: the pragmatists and hard-liners. Pragmatists have pushed for global engagement and opening of schools to girls of all ages. The hard-liners want to return Afghanistan to the late 1990s Taliban rule when women and girls were denied access to most public spaces and a rigid and unforgiving version of Islam and tribal rule was imposed.</p> <p>A flurry of repressive edicts of late suggest the hard-liners have the upper hand, including an order that women wear all-encompassing veils that leave only the eyes visible and a decision not to allow girls to attend school past the sixth grade.</p> <p>Yaqoob falls among the pragmatists, according to several prominent Afghans familiar with the Taliban leadership. Still, there seems no decision among the leaders on either side of the divide to oust militants on their territory.</p> <p>"I do not see any quick fix to the Pakistan-Afghan situation. The Taliban will continue to provide sanctuary to the TTP and hope they can extend their own influence into Pakistan over time," said Shuja Nawaz, an expert and fellow at the South Asia Center of the U.S-based Atlantic Council.</p> <p>"So, expect the situation to deteriorate, especially with the (Pakistan) military calling the shots on Afghan policy," Nawaz said.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/18 Mystery issue NASA Voyager 1 probe
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/18/world/nasa-voyager-1-issue-scn/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The Voyager 1 probe is still exploring interstellar space 45 years after launching, but it has encountered an issue that mystifies the spacecraft's team on Earth.</p> <p>Voyager 1 continues to operate well, despite its advanced age and 14.5 billion-mile distance (23.3 billion kilometers) from Earth. And it can receive and execute commands sent from NASA, as well as gather and send back science data.</p> <p>But the readouts from the attitude articulation and control system, which control the spacecraft's orientation in space, don't match up with what Voyager is actually doing. The attitude articulation and control system, or AACS, ensures that the probe's high-gain antenna remains pointed at Earth so Voyager can send data back to NASA.</p> <p>Due to Voyager's interstellar location, it takes light 20 hours and 33 minutes to travel one way, so the call and response of one message between NASA and Voyager takes two days.</p> <p>So far, the Voyager team believes the AACS is still working, but the instrument's data readouts seem random or impossible. The system issue hasn't triggered anything to put the spacecraft into "safe mode" so far. That's when only essential operations occur so engineers can diagnose an issue that would put the spacecraft at risk.</p> <p>And Voyager's signal is as strong as ever, meaning the antenna is still pointed to Earth. The team is trying to determine if this incorrect data is coming directly from this instrument or if another system is causing it.</p> <p>"Until the nature of the issue is better understood, the team cannot anticipate whether this might affect how long the spacecraft can collect and transmit science data," according to a NASA release.</p>

"A mystery like this is sort of par for the course at this stage of the Voyager mission," said Suzanne Dodd, project manager for Voyager 1 and 2 at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, in a statement.

"The spacecraft are both almost 45 years old, which is far beyond what the mission planners anticipated. We're also in interstellar space -- a high-radiation environment that no spacecraft have flown in before. So there are some big challenges for the engineering team. But I think if there's a way to solve this issue with the AACS, our team will find it."

If the team doesn't determine the source of the issue, they may just adapt to it, Dodd said. Or if they can find it, the issue may be solved by making a software change or relying on a redundant hardware system.

Voyager has already relied on backup systems to last as long as it has. In 2017, the probe fired thrusters that were used during its initial planetary encounters during the 1970s -- and they still worked after remaining unused for 37 years.

The aging probes produce very little power per year, so subsystems and heaters have been turned off over the years so that critical systems and science instruments can keep operating.

Voyager 2, a twin spacecraft, continues to operate well in interstellar space 12.1 billion miles (19.5 billion kilometers) from Earth. By comparison, Neptune, the farthest planet from Earth, is, at most, only 2.9 billion miles away. Both probes were launched in 1977 and have far exceeded their original purpose to fly by planets.

Now, they have become the only two spacecraft to gather data from interstellar space and provide insights about the heliosphere, or the bubble created by the sun that extends beyond the planets in our solar system.

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HEADLINE	05/19 EU: Easter eggs linked to salmonella
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/salmonella-cases-easter-eggs-eu/
GIST	<p>European health officials say that 266 confirmed cases and 58 suspected cases of an outbreak of salmonella infection linked to chocolate Easter eggs have now been reported throughout Europe and in North America, the vast majority in children.</p> <p>The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control said that 86.3% of the cases were among children aged 10 or younger, and for all cases in Europe with information available, 41.3% of them were hospitalized. No deaths have been reported.</p> <p>Cases have been reported in 14 European countries, Canada and the United States.</p> <p>The European Union agency still suspects a Belgian factory. Its closure in April, the global recall and withdrawal of their products from the shelves "have reduced the risk of exposure, but new cases may occur due to the long shelf life and possible storage of products at home," the agency said.</p> <p>In early April, food authorities in several European countries said that Italian company Ferrero has recalled specific batches of Kinder chocolate products due to suspicions of a connection between the products and an outbreak of salmonella.</p> <p>The two outbreak strains, which both are multidrug-resistant, were identified in 10 of the 81 salmonella-positive samples taken in the Belgian plant in December and January, including in buttermilk, semi-finished and finished products. The buttermilk was provided by an Italian supplier where salmonella was not detected.</p>

	<p>"Based on the available evidence, salmonella has not been detected in other plants," the agency said Wednesday.</p> <p>The Stockholm-based agency said it continues to monitor the situation, and encouraged close cooperation with food safety authorities in the countries affected.</p> <p>The CDC estimates salmonella causes about 1.35 million infections, 26,500 hospitalizations, and 420 deaths in the U.S. every year.</p> <p>The bacteria that causes the illness, salmonellosis, can cause diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. Illness typically lasts four to seven days and most people will recover without treatment, however some may need to be hospitalized for severe diarrhea. The elderly, infants, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Monkeypox confirmed in US, Europe
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/05/18/monkeypox-faq/
GIST	<p>Massachusetts health authorities said Wednesday that they confirmed a case of a rare and sometimes serious viral illness called monkeypox — the first infection identified in the United States this year amid a rash of cases outside the disease’s typical territory.</p> <p>Monkeypox, which can be passed to animals and humans, is usually found in Central and West Africa. But health authorities in Europe have confirmed more than a dozen cases this month and are investigating dozens more. Some infections confirmed in the United Kingdom “have no travel links” to a place where monkeypox is regularly found, officials said, suggesting the virus may be spreading through the community.</p> <p>Monkeypox is not known to spread easily between humans. The fact that cases are emerging in several countries at once — with signs of “sustained” transmission in people — is striking, said Aris Katzourakis, a professor of evolution and genomics at the University of Oxford.</p> <p>“It’s either a lot of bad luck or something quite unusual happening here,” Katzourakis said.</p> <p>What is monkeypox?</p> <p>Monkeypox is named for the animals in which it was discovered. The disease cropped up in 1958 among monkeys kept for research, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — more than a decade before a human case was identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo.</p> <p>Mass vaccination against smallpox “presumably” curbed monkeypox infections for a time among humans, researchers wrote in a 2005 article. But cases resurged, thanks in part to a lack of immunity in later generations, they say. More than 450 cases have been reported in Nigeria since 2017, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Monkeypox infections typically last two to four weeks, the CDC says, and begin with flu-like symptoms and swelling of the lymph nodes. Eventually fluid-filled bumps — or “pox” — spread across the skin.</p> <p>The disease can spread through contact with animals, infected people and materials used by infected people, health authorities say. Examples listed by the CDC include contact with bodily fluids, contact with monkeypox sores and infection through “respiratory droplets” in a “close setting” such as a shared household.</p> <p>Monkeypox can be deadly, but two major strains of the virus pose different risks. About 1 in 10 people infected with a Congo Basin strain have been found to die, according to the World Health Organization, while a West African strain appeared to be fatal for about 1 in 100 people infected.</p>

That milder strain is the one infecting people who were hospitalized in the United Kingdom, health authorities said. It is not clear what strain the Massachusetts patient contracted.

How worried should we be? How does this compare to covid-19?

Experts stress that monkeypox is different from the [coronavirus](#) that upended the world.

Monkeypox is highly visible, making contact-tracing and isolation easier. An existing smallpox vaccine could help protect the public if needed, Katzourakis said. And “we don’t have the potential for something spreading through the globe at anything like the kind of rate that we saw with covid,” he said, because monkeypox transmits less easily between humans.

Still, the latest spate of cases stands out, Katzourakis said. The longer it continues, the more chance the virus has to mutate and improve its transmissibility, just as the novel coronavirus has.

Outbreaks of monkeypox have typically been small, with patients in the single digits, said Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. “So I think the risk to the general public at this point, from the information we have, is very, very low.”

But he agreed the latest cases raise many questions. “We don’t really have the sense yet of what’s driving it. ... There isn’t a travel link that’s identified that brings these cases all together,” he said.

Health officials have noted recent cases among men who have sex with other men — a pattern that is crucial to understand, Inglesby said, as officials have not previously considered sexual orientation to be a risk factor for monkeypox.

Has monkeypox made it to the United States before?

Monkeypox made its way to the United States — and the Western Hemisphere — for the first time in 2003, [researchers say](#). More than 70 cases were reported in the Midwest, mostly among people who were exposed to prairie dogs apparently infected by rodents from Ghana, [according to the CDC](#). Two children fell seriously ill and recovered, the CDC said.

The infection reported Wednesday in Massachusetts is the first case of monkeypox identified in the United States this year, health officials said. Texas and Maryland reported one infection each last year in “people with recent travel to Nigeria,” the Massachusetts Department of Public Health said.

Where else has monkeypox been identified this month?

The United Kingdom and Portugal have announced confirmed cases, while Spanish authorities on Wednesday said they are investigating more than 20 suspected cases. The first known patient in the United Kingdom traveled recently to Nigeria, officials said.

The WHO [said](#) the person developed a rash in late April, shortly before leaving Africa. People identified as contacts have yet to report “compatible symptoms,” the global health organization said Monday.

But more cases have emerged.

British health authorities announced two new infections Wednesday, for a total of nine infections confirmed in England since May 6. The agency said there are no clear links between the latest two patients and previous confirmed cases or countries where monkeypox usually occurs — raising the possibility of community transmission.

Recent cases were “predominantly in gay, bisexual or men who have sex with men,” the U.K. Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said. The agency [is advising](#) people in those groups to be especially “alert to any unusual rashes or lesions on any part of their body.”

The WHO said it has learned of seven confirmed or probable cases — including three in one family — that appear to be “locally acquired in the United Kingdom.”

Portugal’s Directorate-General of Health, meanwhile, [said](#) more than 20 “suspected cases” were identified this month. Five of them are confirmed, the agency said, and infections are concentrated among young men.

What do we know about the U.S. case?

A man who recently traveled to Canada was tested for the virus Tuesday, and the infection was confirmed by the CDC on Wednesday, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health said in a [statement](#).

The CDC is monitoring six Americans after they sat on a plane near a British patient, CDC medical officer Agam Rao told The Washington Post on Wednesday. None of the patients have shown signs of monkeypox symptoms.

U.S. officials said clinicians should consider a diagnosis of monkeypox in people with an otherwise unexplained rash who traveled to a country that had a confirmed case, had contact with someone who may be infected or is a man who had sexual contact with other men.

What now?

The CDC is working with counterparts in other countries to compile information that can answer experts’ many questions.

“We’re still early on in all of this to really understand the scope of it and the reason for it,” Rao said. “We’re very much in response mode where we’re trying to identify cases, identify potential contacts, make sure that we provide the right recommendations for all those people, including the health-care personnel caring for the patient.”

The disease is so rare, Johns Hopkins’ Inglesby said, that “most clinicians in America will never see a case in their lifetimes” — so communication about monkeypox will be important in ensuring doctors are watching for symptoms.

Another top priority, he said: gaining more information about any links between far-flung infections. Is the disease spreading from West and Central Africa to other countries independently? Or are cases spreading through networks of people?

“It’s going to be really important for us to understand that, because once you understand how cases are spreading ... it gives us a chance to intervene,” Inglesby said.

Getting the genetic sequence of the virus behind the recent cases will help scientists check whether they are dealing with a new strain of monkeypox. Unlike with influenza or the coronavirus, Inglesby said, researchers have not observed much change in monkeypox over the years, “and it’ll be important to make sure that that remains the case.”

How did we get here?

Thanks to global trade and travel, poxviruses are able to spread farther, experts said. The eradication of smallpox in 1980 has helped remaining poxviruses slip past waning protections, said Anne Rimoin, an epidemiologist at the University of California at Los Angeles who has studied monkeypox for two decades.

“No good deed goes unpunished,” Rimoin said. “You declare that you can eradicate a pathogen, but you might leave space for another to emerge.”

	<p>Rao said that while researchers have found a rise in monkeypox prevalence since the end of the smallpox vaccine campaign, other factors have been linked to the infections, including climate change and other environmental shifts that have led to more human and animal interactions.</p> <p>“We’re at a point right now where we just really need to figure out why this is happening before we can start proposing solutions, like vaccinations,” Rao said. “This is just unexpected. It’s not something we would have recommended if you had asked me two weeks ago because the risk to the general population is extremely rare.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Long, strange journey China maritime crew
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/from-longview-to-tanzania-the-long-strange-journey-of-a-chinese-crew-struggling-to-get-home/
GIST	<p>Boarding the Tai Honesty off Longview earlier this month, U.S. Coast Guard inspectors found the 623-foot-long bulk cargo ship to be unseaworthy.</p> <p>The problem had nothing to do with leaks, engine trouble or overloading. Instead, the Coast Guard team at the Southwest Washington port focused on the risk posed by a dozen homesick Chinese crew members, who had been stuck on the vessel for more than 14 months.</p> <p>“Crew fatigue and the duration of time that critical crew members have been on board ... presented a clearly hazardous condition to the safety of the ship and the waterway,” said Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Clark of the Coast Guard’s 13th District.</p> <p>The Coast Guard ordered the Tai Honesty to stay moored near the Columbia River port until a dozen new crew had been brought in as replacements, Clark said. This unusual action involved collaboration with Washington-based representatives of the International Transport Workers’ Federation, who found that the workers were four months past the 10-month maximum duty time specified in their labor agreement.</p> <p>“When we went on board, one of the seafarers came right up to us and said, ‘We want to go home,’” recalled Jeff Engels, who is based in Seattle for the federation, an association of international unions. “That’s what this is about. Getting them home.”</p> <p>On Saturday, the dozen crew members were allowed to leave the ship, Engels said. They then flew to Tanzania, where they are scheduled to quarantine before returning home to China.</p> <p>The Tai Honesty crew members are part of a workforce that labors aboard foreign vessels vital to moving cargo in and out of Washington ports. Since the COVID-19 pandemic set in, many maritime crews that move goods internationally have found themselves stuck on board vessels for weeks or months past contract expiration dates.</p> <p>In December 2020, the challenges encountered by international crews trying to return home drew the attention of the United Nations General Assembly, which passed a resolution urging governments to allow “stranded seafarers to be repatriated,” expedite their travel and ensure their access to medical care.</p> <p>The Coast Guard, in a March 2021 safety bulletin, cited the “physical and mental fatigue of seafarers unable to leave their vessels at the end of their contracts” as a “growing humanitarian concern.” That bulletin included an email address for international mariners to notify the Coast Guard if they were facing obstacles to returning to their home countries amid a crew change.</p> <p>The Tai Honesty came to Longview to pick up soybean meal, according to Ashley Helenberg, a Longview Port official. The vessel’s registered owner is Taiwan-based Tai Shing Maritime but it sails under the Panamanian flag, according to documents reviewed by Engels. A company representative could not be reached for comment.</p>

The transport federation refers to such arrangements — where a ship operates and is taxed under the laws of the country whose flag it is flying — as “flags of convenience.” Engels is West Coast coordinator for a global campaign by the federation to monitor such vessels and enforce collective bargaining agreements.

Before the vessel arrived in Longview, the Coast Guard received a tip from someone on the vessel about the concerns of 12 seamen — part of a larger crew of more than 20 — about their length of shipboard duty. The Coast Guard then relayed the information to the International Transport Workers’ Federation, according to Clark, the Coast Guard spokesperson.

China has locked down Shanghai and other cities in an effort to contain an outbreak of the coronavirus, and the nation’s extreme efforts to contain the virus include lengthy quarantines for crews returning from service on international routes.

Engels said he and another federation inspector, Portland-based Ryan Brazeau, both boarded the Tai Honesty on May 6 to meet with crew after trying without success to negotiate with a representative of the owner to secure flights home to China.

But after that meeting, the Coast Guard ordered the ship to remain in port. The owner then agreed to bring in the new crew, Engels said.

By last Saturday, the new crew had arrived, and Brazeau returned to the vessel to bid farewell to the departing crew members.

“They were very excited. The captain was the first one to say thank you,” Brazeau said.

The Tai Honesty is now en route to its next port of call in the Philippines, according to the Port of Longview’s Helenberg. And the 12 former crew members have begun a quarantine of uncertain duration in Tanzania. Engels said the federation has asked the owner to provide pay, as well as room and board, while the crew is in Tanzania. He is still unsure if that pay, which is called for in the labor contract, will be provided.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/19 Alarming number of teachers in sex crimes
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/135-teachers-charged-child-sex-crimes-this-year-alone
GIST	<p>At least 135 teachers and teachers’ aides have been arrested so far this year on child sex-related crimes in the U.S., ranging from child pornography to raping students.</p> <p>An analysis conducted by Fox News Digital looked at local news stories week by week featuring arrests of teachers and teachers’ aides on child sex-related crimes in school districts across the country. Arrests that weren't publicized were not counted in the analysis, meaning the true number may well be higher.</p> <p>The analysis found that at least 135 teachers and teachers’ aides have been arrested in 41 states between January 1 and May 13, which works out to about an arrest a day on average.</p> <p>The vast majority of the arrested educators were men.</p> <p>Of the 135 arrests, at least 102, or 76%, involved alleged crimes against students.</p> <p>The 135 educators included 117 teachers, 11 teachers' aides and seven substitute teachers.</p> <p>Many of the arrests involved especially heinous allegations.</p>

On April 11, [police in California charged](#) Anthony James Phillips, a 61-year-old former teacher at Cupertino Middle School in Sunnyvale, with aggravated sexual assault of a child, forcible penetration with a foreign object, and forcible penetration with a foreign object upon a child.

Phillips is accused of raping a student in 2009 when he was still a teacher at Cupertino.

Anessa Paige Gower, a 35-year-old former biology teacher at Making Waves Academy in Richmond, California, was charged with 29 counts of child molestation on April 8.

Gower is accused of sexually abusing seven students between 2021-2022 when she was a teacher at Making Waves, with allegations including forcible sodomy of minors and sharing sexually graphic photos over online platforms. She is [due back in court](#) on June 2.

William Landon Smith, a 31-year-old former science teacher at Cape Fear High School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, [was charged](#) with 27 counts of first-degree sexual exploitation of a minor, 28 counts of indecent liberties with a student, and one count of secretly using or installing a photographic imaging device to arouse or gratify sexual desire on March 18.

Smith is accused of inappropriately communicating with students via social media apps like Snapchat when he was a teacher at Cape Fear.

John M. Doty, a 35-year-old former biology teacher at Career Academy South Bend in Indiana, [was charged](#) with two counts of rape, one count of attempted rape and six counts of child seduction on Feb. 9. Doty is accused of repeatedly raping a 16-year-old female student and threatening to kill her. He [is scheduled](#) to stand trial in January 2023.

Danielle Fischer, a 29-year-old former substitute teacher in the Roxana and Alton school districts, [was charged](#) with criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse on Feb. 4.

Fischer is accused of sexually assaulting two teenage male students at her home in Edwardsville during summer break last year. A Madison County grand jury later added child pornography to the charges.

Erika Sanzi, director of outreach for Parents Defending Education, told Fox News Digital that the issue of teacher sex crimes against students needs to be more thoroughly examined by the federal government. She cited the [Department of Education's 2004 report](#), which claimed that nearly 9.6% of students are targets of educator sexual misconduct sometime during their school career.

"Educator sexual abuse is a major problem that largely gets ignored because it's so uncomfortable to talk about," Sanzi said in a statement. "While a very small fraction of educators and school employees prey on the children in their care, one bad actor can do damage to many students."

"The last federally commissioned study on the issue was in 2004, pre-smart phone and those who study the issue closely say that the problem has been exacerbated by the ease of communication that a smart phone provides," she continued. "We need to get much more honest about the problem, study it again and ensure that we have policies and laws in place that protect children. It is currently legal in Massachusetts and Rhode Island for teachers and other adults in positions of authority to have sexual relationships with students once they turn 14. After a 5-year effort, RI finally appears poised to change that this year."

Sanzi was referring to a bipartisan bill in Rhode Island that would make it a crime for a teacher or person of authority to have sexual contact with someone under the age of 18.

Christopher Rufo, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, said the lack of research on teacher sex crimes against students is a "travesty."

"The public school system has a serious child sex abuse problem," he told Fox News Digital in a statement. "The last significant federal study on this topic, which was conducted by the Department of

	<p>Education in 2004, suggested that millions of American schoolchildren are victims of teacher sexual misconduct in each generation of K-12 students—and there hasn't been any significant research since then.</p> <p>"This is a travesty," he continued. "Parents deserve to know exactly what's happening in the public school system and deserve to have tools for protecting their children from abuse. Congress should immediately fund a \$25 million research program into child sexual abuse in public schools and provide complete transparency for parents. The first duty of public schools is to keep kids safe—and, tragically, that's not happening in far too many cases."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/19 Buffalo 911 operator hung up on 'help' call
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/buffalo-shooting-91-dispatcher-leave/
GIST	<p>An assistant manager who hid behind a counter during the massacre at a Buffalo grocery store says a 911 operator hung up on her because she was whispering.</p> <p>Latisha Rogers, 33, ducked behind a customer desk and called for help as the gunman stalked the aisles at Tops supermarket.</p> <p>Rogers told her story at a recent church service, saying she tried to explain she had to whisper so the gunman wouldn't hear her. But she says the operator hung up on her and she had to call her boyfriend and tell him to call 911.</p> <p>The story is causing outrage in the community.</p> <p>"I find it disgusting that this 911 operator hung up on her because she was whispering," produce manager Rose Marie Wysocki said.</p> <p>The Erie County Central Police Services said in a statement that the person who took the call is on "administrative leave pending a disciplinary hearing."</p> <p>Peter Anderson, a spokesperson for the executive of Erie County, said in an email to The Associated Press that "termination will be sought."</p> <p>Meanwhile, online diaries reveal that the 18-year-old accused gunman studied a YouTube video called "Buffalo's Worst Neighborhoods" as he scoped out potential targets.</p> <p>He boasted that his parents knew nothing about the growing arsenal of weapons and ammunition in their home.</p> <p>"It's not the parents' fault that a kid commits murder, but there are so many people who may be able to reach out and stop a murderer, and the parents are right there at the front of the line," former FBI special agent Katherine Schweit said.</p> <p>The indefinite closure of the supermarket has left a gaping void for the neighborhood residents.</p> <p>"Tops was a staple for this whole community," one person said.</p> <p>The city is coming to the aid of people who shopped at Tops and no longer have that place to go, with donated food and other supplies.</p> <p>The Buffalo Bills football team came out to serve hot food, making sure nobody went hungry. The team and the NFL foundation have donated \$400,000 to relief efforts.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Stevens Co. FD stolen, damaged firetrucks
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/stevens-county/stevens-co-fire-department-stolen-damaged-firetrucks/293-6c6196eb-ad67-406f-9c44-fea50ec0f670
GIST	<p>STEVENS COUNTY, Wash. — The Stevens County Fire Department is warning its residents that it may take longer to respond to your calls after one of it's trucks was stolen and another was badly damaged.</p> <p>Stevens County emergency services have had a rough week. The fire chief for Fire District 2 not only noticed one of their trucks was severely damaged, but someone had also stolen their wildfire truck as well. Chief Rick Anderson says this means his station is out of service for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Stevens County Fire District 2 is ready to handle any challenge that comes their way. But, operating without its only two functioning firetrucks is one challenge they never expected.</p> <p>Chief Rick Anderson is the one who discovered the missing truck.</p> <p>"As the fire chief, you know, you always kind of glanced at your facilities to drive by and I drove by and I slammed on the brakes and said, 'All right, who left the door open,'" Anderson said.</p> <p>To his surprise, the brush truck was gone. Then, he checked the structure fire truck and found several things missing, including the radio and batteries.</p> <p>"It was like, 'Oh, this can't be happening.' You know, we're just a little volunteer fire department and this is kind of a big issue," Anderson said.</p> <p>He says it takes his team about 15 minutes to respond to calls for service. But without their trucks, they are relying on neighboring stations to respond for the time being.</p> <p>"So, that means the next available truck is Hunters. So, that puts another 15 minutes out to 20 minutes out for initial response," Anderson said.</p> <p>Anderson is anxious to find the stolen truck and get it back into service. That's because he says wildfires are the biggest threat to his community, and wildfire season is quickly approaching.</p> <p>"The optimistic side of me says somebody's going to call and say, 'hey, it's parked under a tree come and get it,'" Anderson said.</p> <p>Chief Anderson, who is also the 911 director for Stevens County, heard the news about an impaired driver ramming into a county ambulance. Deputies arrested the driver for DUI.</p> <p>"As we often say in the 911 Center, you just can't make this stuff up," Anderson said.</p> <p>Emergency officials hope this is the end of a streak of really bad luck for the sake of their community.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Highway shootings spike during pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/interstate-highway-shootings-surged-pandemic-abc-news-analysis/story?id=84791234
GIST	<p>As the nation continues to grapple with mass shootings in New York and California this past weekend, a new analysis by ABC News and ABC's owned stations shows a startling rise in gun violence along interstate highways across the country over the last few years.</p> <p>The analysis, which examined nearly 3,000 shootings that occurred on or near U.S. interstates from January 2018 through March 2022, found that interstate highway shootings across the country spiked alongside the overall surge in gun violence over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, with New Orleans, Chicago and Memphis seeing some of the biggest spikes.</p>

Interstate highway shootings rose from 540 incidents in 2019 to 846 incidents in 2021 -- in increase of 57% -- according to the data, which was collected by the Gun Violence Archive, an independent research group.

In just the first three months of this year, at least 149 shooting incidents occurred along or near interstate highways, the data shows.

In all, the incidents resulted in 680 people killed and more than 1,600 people injured over the last four years and three months, according to the data.

The full report by ABC News Chief Justice Correspondent Pierre Thomas, "Highway Gunplay: An ABC News Investigation," will stream on ABC News Live Prime with Linsey Davis, Wednesday at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

The data collected by the Gun Violence Archive helps shed light on some of the nation's most dangerous stretches of highway out of the more than 47,000 miles of interstates across the country.

According to the data, I-10 in the New Orleans area has been the single most violent stretch of interstate in terms of gun incidents between 2019 and 2021. It's followed by I-94 in the Chicago area, I-240 in the Memphis area, I-35 in the Austin area and I-70 in the St. Louis area.

Courtney Bradford, a young man who was about to be married, was shot and killed late last year while riding as a passenger in a car on I-240 in Memphis. He and his fiancé had just bought a new home to share with their 5-year-old daughter.

"I've called him by mistake. It's very hard," Bradford's fiancé, Latoya Henley, told ABC News' Thomas about dealing with Bradford's death seven months ago.

The shooting that took Bradford's life was one of 121 interstate shootings Memphis Police responded to in 2021, according to data provided by the police department.

"What's even more unsettling is the fact that they're so reckless," Bradford's mother Tonja Rounds told ABC News. "You could be aiming at one particular individual -- but you're shooting on the expressway and people are driving by, so you could shoot anybody."

"It's very insane," Henley said. "I get antsy when I'm on the expressway."

Seven months after the shooting, Henley and Rounds say police don't appear to be any closer to determining who took Bradford's life. The shooting occurred at night, and surveillance cameras were unable to provide any details about the car that the shots came from.

"We just keep trusting and believing that someone is going to come forward," Rounds said.

Memphis, New Orleans, Chicago and Detroit are among the cities that have been hit hardest by the surge in highway shootings over the last few years, with the number of shootings increasing even more as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the U.S.

Eight of the 10 stretches of interstates with the highest number of gun incidents between 2019 and 2021 are in those four cities, according to the Gun Violence Archive data. Shooting incidents on or near interstates in those cities alone killed at least 63 people and injured at least 284 others during that time, accounting for nearly 12% of all deaths and 23% of all injuries reported from interstate gun violence nationwide during those years.

I-10, which runs across the southern U.S. from Florida to California, had the highest number of interstate highway shootings during the pandemic period, including at least 79 incidents in Louisiana -- many of them occurring around New Orleans.

"You've got what police chiefs are calling the pandemic impact on crime," Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, told ABC News. "It cannot be underestimated."

"Traffic stops have decreased, so now a small altercation -- someone cuts someone off on the road -- that can quickly escalate," Wexler said. "And that altercation becomes a shooting, becomes a homicide."

During the pandemic years, between 2020 and 2021, the Gun Violence Archive data showed at least 121 interstate shootings in the Chicago area, averaging out to one incident every six days. The group found 73 incidents in the New Orleans area, 58 incidents in the Detroit area, 57 incidents in the Memphis area and 38 incidents in the St. Louis area.

The spike in highway shootings during the pandemic mirrors a surge in overall gun violence.

According to data released this month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gun homicides increased 35% across the country during the pandemic, to the highest level in 25 years.

Firearm murders increased most markedly among youths and young adults, with the number of victims age 10-24 rising by 40%. People of color experienced the highest increase, as the number of Black male shooting victims age 10-24 years -- already 21 times higher than the number of white male victims of the same age -- increased even further in 2020.

An analysis of data provided by the Houston Police Department by ABC13 showed that homicides along the city's highways and streets doubled during the pandemic, driving a surge in the overall number of homicides in the city during the two pandemic years. Among those killed in Houston road rage incidents was 17-year-old David Castro, who was fatally shot last summer on I-10 while leaving an Astros baseball game, and Tyler Mitchell, who died earlier this month after being shot along the same interstate just before his 22nd birthday.

In California, the Gun Violence Archive identified more than 200 interstate highway shootings between January 2018 and March of 2022, with many of them occurring on I-5, I-80 and I-580. And additional shootings occurred on Southern California freeways that aren't part of the interstate system; last year, the California Highway Patrol reported at least 80 incidents of cars being shot at while traveling on SoCal freeways in just the one-month span between late April and late May, with the majority of them occurring along the 91 Freeway that runs from east of the 15 Freeway west toward the 605 Freeway.

Law enforcement officials say the nature of highway shootings typically makes them more difficult to track and solve than other types of shootings.

"The evidence and the crime scene is moving, sometimes 70, 80, 90 miles an hour," said Illinois State Police Director Brendan Kelly.

As a result, said Kelly, the Illinois State Police are adding patrols and increasing searches to identify people with illegal weapons in their cars. They've also added new cameras along interstates to try to better track suspects.

"We will use license plate readers, we will use our air operations, we will use our patrol officers that are out there, we will use canines, we will use all the tools at our disposal to be able to pursue the people that are responsible for this violence," Kelly said.

In the Detroit area, where the Detroit Police Department says they've seen an average of five freeway shootings a month over the past three years, the city has teamed up with more than three dozen other law enforcement agencies to launch "Operation Brison," a multi-city effort to crack down on freeway shootings after two-year-old Brison Christian was killed last year when someone opened fire on his family's vehicle on I-17 in what the police say was a case of mistaken identity.

	<p>Two alleged gang members have been charged with murder in the case.</p> <p>But in Memphis, Latoya Henley is still waiting for resolution to her fiancé's murder.</p> <p>"We don't know what happened at all," Henley told ABC News. "We don't know who's involved."</p> <p>"I don't want anyone to ever feel what I feel," she said. "I pray a lot, 'cause the one thing I don't want to be is angry. Because that's what I was at first -- I was angry. I was confused. And I was in disbelief. And you know, some days, I'm still in disbelief."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 'Pharma bro' released from prison early
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/martin-shkreli-infamous-pharma-bro-released-prison-early/story?id=84813376
GIST	<p>Martin Shkreli, who was derided with the nickname "Pharma Bro" after he hiked the price of a lifesaving drug, and who flaunted his pricey purchase of a one-of-a-kind Wu Tang Clan album, is out of prison, his lawyer said Wednesday.</p> <p>Shkreli had been convicted of securities fraud and other offenses and was sentenced to seven years in prison.</p> <p>He was released Wednesday after serving about five years.</p> <p>"I am pleased to report that Martin Shkreli has been released from Allenwood prison and transferred to a BOP halfway house after completing all programs that allowed for his prison sentence to be shortened. While in the halfway house I have encouraged Mr. Shkreli to make no further statement, nor will he or I have any additional comments at this time," defense attorney Benjamin Brafman said in a statement provided to ABC News.</p> <p>Shkreli earned widespread condemnation in 2015 when he raised the price of Daraprim -- an anti-malaria medication often prescribed for HIV patients -- by 4,000%. He also initiated a scheme to block the entry of generic drug competition so that his company, Turing Pharmaceuticals, could reap the profits from Daraprim sales for as long as possible, according to a federal judge that ruled earlier this year he should pay \$64 million for his actions.</p> <p>He was convicted of securities fraud in August 2017 in connection with his work at hedge funds MSMB Capital Management and MSMB Healthcare Management prior to founding Turing Pharmaceuticals. Shkreli, prosecutors said, used bogus information that defrauded investors in the hedge funds to pay back more than \$10 million to disgruntled investors.</p> <p>He had called the trial a "witch hunt" and blamed his increase in the cost of Daraprim for making him a target of federal investigators.</p> <p>In addition to getting sentenced to seven years in prison for securities fraud, Shkreli was ordered to pay a \$75,000 fine and \$7.3 million in forfeiture.</p> <p>Shkreli had unsuccessfully lobbied to be released from prison early on May 2020 after claiming his expertise could be used to find a cure for COVID-19.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Woman led jobless fraud ring from prison?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/us/unemployment-fraud-scheme-california.html
GIST	<p>A California woman serving a life prison sentence for murder led a scheme to collect at least \$2 million in unemployment benefits using stolen identities, including those of other incarcerated people, federal prosecutors said.</p>

The woman, Natalie Le DeMola, 37, was one of 13 people charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud by collecting unemployment benefits using the personal information of people who were ineligible for the aid, the U.S. attorney's office in the Central District of California announced on Tuesday.

An unnamed prison official provided some of this personal information, such as birth dates and Social Security numbers, by collecting it from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation databases, prosecutors said.

According to a 39-count indictment, members of the ring filed hundreds of unemployment applications online between June 2020 and April 2021 using the personal information of people, including themselves, who were not eligible for benefits because they were incarcerated, retired or working. Prosecutors said the applications were mostly for pandemic unemployment benefits expanded to help people who had lost work because of the coronavirus pandemic.

During this period, the California Employment Development Department awarded successful applicants with a debit account and debit cards sent to their mailing addresses.

Prosecutors allege the people named in the indictment used debit cards tied to stolen identities to take out money from A.T.M.s in cities across Southern California, including Los Angeles, Riverside and Ventura.

The defendants are charged with 31 counts of bank fraud, which each carry a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison, and seven counts of aggravated identify theft, which carry a mandatory two-year consecutive sentence.

Federal authorities arrested five of the defendants on Tuesday. One other defendant was in custody in a Los Angeles County jail, prosecutors said.

Ms. DeMola is imprisoned for the murder of her mother, Kim DeMola, who was "savagely beaten" at their home in Corona, Calif., in April 2001. She was 16 at the time and dating Terry Lee Bell, then 17.

Kim DeMola died a week after the beating, according to a report filed by a federal magistrate judge in 2015.

In April 2005, a Riverside County Superior Court jury convicted Ms. DeMola and Mr. Bell of first-degree murder. They were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole in July 2005, the judge's report said. Ms. DeMola could not be reached for comment.

The other defendants in the unemployment fraud scheme are still being sought, the authorities said. It is not clear if the prison official will also face charges.

The investigation into the unemployment scheme was conducted by several federal, state and local agencies, including the Los Angeles El Camino Real Financial Crimes Task Force, which is led by Homeland Security Investigations and investigates financial crimes in Southern California.

Investigators searched the prison official's records after receiving a tip and found that the worker had accessed information belonging to hundreds of incarcerated women, 42 incarcerated men and their approved visitors, according to an affidavit. More than 250 of those names were used to apply for unemployment benefits, the court papers said.

In September 2020, two of the defendants — Khanshanda King, 31, and Cleshay Johnson II, 28 — were arrested during a traffic stop in Inglewood, Calif., with evidence related to the scheme, including A.T.M. receipts tied to unemployment benefits accounts, according to an affidavit. The police also found a ledger in their car listing 98 profiles of people whose personal information was used to apply for unemployment benefits.

One of the people named in the ledger was an 83-year-old man who had never lived in California and told investigators that he did not know the people who had used his identity to claim benefits, the court papers said. Another man, who had been in prison for 15 years, told investigators that he was not familiar with unemployment benefits and did not know the people who had opened a benefits card in his name.

There have been several instances of people stealing personal information to fraudulently collect unemployment benefits expanded in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The inspector general for the U.S. Department of Labor, Larry Turner, estimated that \$163 billion in pandemic unemployment benefits could have been “paid improperly, with a significant portion attributable to fraud,” in testimony at a congressional hearing in March.

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HEADLINE	05/18 Ex-Minneapolis cop guilty plea Floyd case
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/us/thomas-lane-george-floyd.html
GIST	<p>A former Minneapolis police officer, Thomas Lane, pleaded guilty on Wednesday to a second-degree manslaughter charge in the death of George Floyd in 2020, Minnesota’s attorney general said.</p> <p>“I am pleased Thomas Lane has accepted responsibility for his role in Floyd’s death,” the attorney general, Keith Ellison, said in a statement. “His acknowledgment he did something wrong is an important step toward healing the wounds of the Floyd family, our community, and the nation.”</p> <p>Mr. Lane, 39, had been scheduled to go on trial on June 13 with two other former officers, J. Alexander Kueng, 28, and Tou Thao, 36, on charges of second-degree unintentional murder and second-degree manslaughter in Mr. Floyd’s death.</p> <p>In a separate case, the three former officers were found guilty of federal crimes in February for failing to intervene as another officer, Derek Chauvin, killed Mr. Floyd by pressing his knee on his neck for more than nine minutes on May 25, 2020.</p> <p>John Stiles, a spokesman for Mr. Ellison, said Mr. Lane entered the guilty plea on the state charge in front of Judge Peter Cahill of Hennepin County District Court, who set a sentencing date for Sept. 21. State prosecutors and Mr. Lane’s defense have jointly recommended a three-year prison sentence, he said.</p> <p>Now that Mr. Lane has entered the plea, the June 13 trial will go ahead without him, because the state dismissed Mr. Lane’s second charge, Mr. Stiles said.</p> <p>“We are still full speed ahead on the trial for both charges” of the other defendants, Mr. Stiles said.</p> <p>Mr. Lane’s lawyer, Earl Gray, said in a telephone interview that Mr. Lane, who has a newborn baby, “wanted to be a part of the child’s life” and did not want to risk possibly losing the murder case.</p> <p>“After a lot of soul-searching that is what we decided to do,” Mr. Gray, said, referring to the guilty plea. It will be served concurrently with his federal sentence, for which there has not been a date. Mr. Lane would serve two years of the 36-month sentence, Mr. Gray said.</p> <p>Lawyers for Mr. Floyd’s family said in a statement on Wednesday that the guilty plea “brings the Floyd family another step towards closure for the horrific and historic murder of George Floyd.”</p> <p>“Hopefully, this plea helps usher in a new era where officers understand that juries will hold them accountable, just as they would any other citizen,” the statement said. “Perhaps soon, officers will not require families to endure the pain of lengthy court proceedings where their criminal acts are obvious and apparent.”</p> <p>Mr. Chauvin was convicted of murder last year and was sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison.</p>

	<p>Mr. Lane and Mr. Kueng helped Mr. Chauvin restrain Mr. Floyd outside a convenience store after a clerk said Mr. Floyd had used a fake \$20 bill to buy cigarettes. As Mr. Chauvin pressed his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck, Mr. Thao, who was Mr. Chauvin's partner, was keeping bystanders away.</p> <p>Video taken by some of the bystanders outside the store in South Minneapolis ricocheted around the world, setting off protests against police violence and racial injustice.</p> <p>Mr. Lane's guilty plea was a "significant moment" in the case, Mr. Ellison said.</p> <p>"Today my thoughts are once again with the victims, George Floyd and his family," he said. "Nothing will bring Floyd back. He should still be with us today."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/18 Tukwila emphasis patrols net arrests
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/emphasis-patrols-tukwila-net-multiple-arrests-drugs-guns/MG2RXHCDYNEKLCXR44KZ2T2O5A/
GIST	<p>Emphasis patrols over the past several weeks in Tukwila have resulted in multiple arrests and the seizure of guns, drugs and stolen merchandise, according to the Tukwila Police Department.</p> <p>The patrols on Andover Park West between Tukwila Parkway and Strander Boulevard began due to concerns from community members and observations from officers and detectives of "brazen narcotic use at bus shelters, drug paraphernalia and litter left behind, erratic behavior of those under the influence of narcotics and an increase in brazen retail theft," according to the department.</p> <p>Law enforcement have made arrests for theft and other active warrants, and have seized drugs like fentanyl, crystal meth, oxycodone and other drugs packaged for either individual use or distribution.</p> <p>Several people arrested had numerous active warrants from multiple jurisdictions.</p> <p>In addition to drugs, officers recovered guns, ammunition and thousands of dollars' worth of stolen merchandise with which thieves had loaded up shopping carts, bags and suitcases.</p> <p>According to police, several thieves tried walking right past officers at the exit of the store with visible merchandise they were trying to steal.</p> <p>"Some just ditched the merchandise inside of the store prior to committing the crime, and one individual, realizing that he was busted, walked right up to two officers on an unrelated call and handed them a suitcase full of alcohol that he had just stolen," the police department's official blog said.</p> <p>Other recovered items include alcohol, Tide pods, clothing, bedding and televisions.</p> <p>Tukwila police say that the majority of the thieves are not from Tukwila and came to the area specifically to commit the crimes.</p> <p>According to the department's blog post, the emphasis patrols have resulted in "a visible drop in individuals loitering in the area, less thefts being reported, less discarded narcotic paraphernalia and less litter in the area."</p>
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